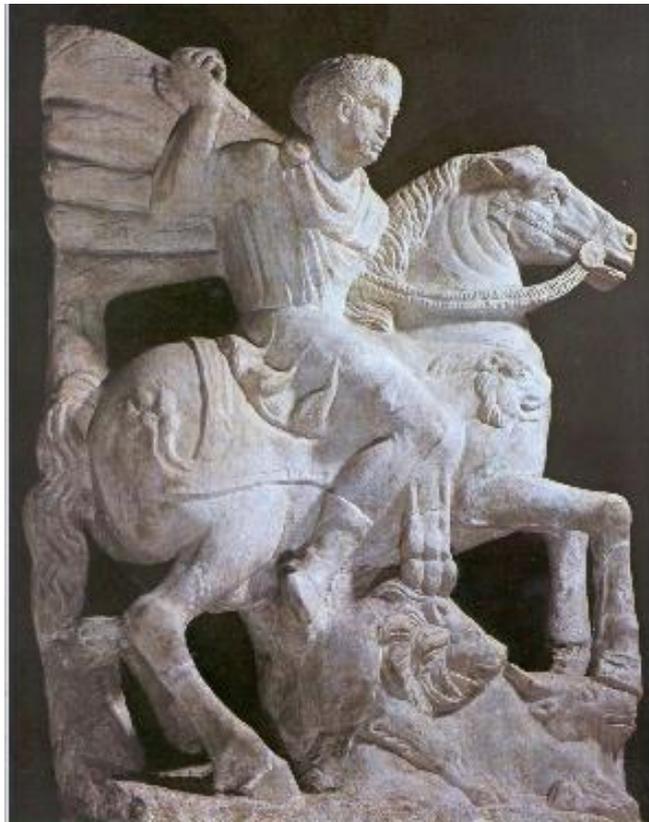


The Cult of Thracian Hero.
A Religious Syncretism Study with Deities and
Heroes in the Western Black Sea Region.

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A Dissertation Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtain the
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To my parents, Δημήτρη and Κατερίνα

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	3
Ancient Sources-Bibliography- Web Sites	4
Preface	10
CHAPTER I	
1.1 Introduction	12
CHAPTER II	
The Thracian Nature of the Hero	
2.1 The Heroised Dead	16
2.2 The Heroised Dead Melsas	18
2.3 A Thracian Heroised Dead; The Case of Rhesus	20
2.4 The Immortal Heroised Dead; The Case of Zalmoxis	23
CHAPTER III	
The Thracian Horseman: Religious Syncretism with Gods in the Western Black Sea Area	
3.1 Asclepius and Hygieia	28
3.2 Apollo	33
3.3 Dionysus	37
3.4 Sabazios	40
3.5 The Great God and Darzalas	45
3.6 Cybele-Mother of Gods	51
3.7 Artemis-Diana and Silvanus	56
3.8 Dioscouroi and Epona	61
CHAPTER IV	
The Thracian Horseman: Religious Syncretism with Heroes in the Western Black Sea Area	
4.1 Hero Karabasmos	65
4.2 Hero Perkos	67
4.3 Hero Manimazos	68
CHAPTER V	
5.1 Conclusion-Results	70
5.2 Image Catalogue	73
5.3 Maps Catalogue	76
5.4 Images-Figures	77
5.5 Maps	111

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PREFACE

My dissertation is about the cult of the Thracian Hero through a religious syncretism analysis with other deities and heroes in the Western Black Sea region. My first interest about this subject was the depictions of the specific motif all over the Black Sea area and the resonance it had to other population other than the Thracians. I am interested to find out the reasons the lining population in the Western Black Sea basin adopted the specific motif and by extension the cult of the Thracian rider in their cultures. As far as the chronological frame of this study, it begins with the earliest archaeological finds of the Thracian Hero in Perperikon dated in the Hellenistic period (early 4th century B.C) until the 4th century A.D. when the cult stopped practicing and the sanctuaries located in ancient Thrace area and Moesia province fell into decline and abandoned. However, it is important to mention that the motif of the Thracian Hero was used four centuries later first by the Bulgarian khans and then by the Christian church. Furthermore, after the examination of the most important and representative monuments and the inscriptions concerning the Thracian Hero's cult, my purpose is to find out if the horseman is an iconographical convention for a god or a hero-messenger to the gods. In addition, I am going to examine the issues of how did this religious syncretism with nearly every Greek, Roman and other Eastern deities function and how did the worshippers who set up a thank-offering or made a vow in hope of well-being, or individuals who erected a grave monument, perceive this deity. Even though there are more than 3000 monuments bearing the image of the Thracian Hero the cult remain rather obscure. I hope with my work to contribute to shed light into this mysterious cult that dominated the area of the Western Black Sea area for more than eight centuries.

The subject of this master is divided in five chapters. In the first chapter there is outlined general information about the term of the Thracian Hero, the chronological frame, the three basic categories the votive and funerary reliefs divided and the most important sanctuaries located in the Western Black Sea area. In the second chapter there is a comprehensive analysis about the Nature of the Hero and the connection with the cult of the Heroised Dead based on the examples of Melsas, Rhesus and Zalmoxis. The third chapter focuses on the religious syncretism between the cult of the Thracian Hero and other important deities worshipped in the same area. In the

fourth chapter there is the religious syncretism with Thracian local heroes and how the worshippers believed their ancestors passed into the immortality after their death. The last chapter records the results and the conclusions about the cult of Thracian Hero through the religious syncretism with other deities and Heroes, explaining why the specific motif dominated the religious life of the population.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Assistant Professor of Classical Archaeology Manolis Manoledakis, for his useful observations and advices during the course of my dissertation. Furthermore, I would like to thank Ioannis Xydopoulos, assistant professor of Ancient Greek History, for his useful and constructive consultation. In addition, I would like to thank personally Georgia Aristodemou, academic associate at the School of Humanities (IHU), because without her support this study could not have been completed in time. Moreover, I am more than grateful for the assistance my colleagues Christophoros Arabatzis and Konstantinos Moschakis offered me during my work in this paper. In conclusion, this dissertation would not have been completed without the constant support of my family and friends.

CHAPTER I

1.1 Introduction

The gods of the Thracians as described by Herodotus in his fifth book “*Ιστορίαι*” were Ares, Dionysus and Artemis. The Thracian kings however preferred to worship Hermes because they claimed that he was their ancestor and by extension their right to rule was divine¹. However, the archaeological finds and especially the votive reliefs discovered in the ancient Thrace region show that without any doubt the most important deity for the Thracians was the famous Hero Rider (fig.1). Even today the scholars failed to explain sufficiently the reasons that one of the greatest historians in antiquity neglected to mention the most important god of the Thracian people. Maybe the main problem is the variance between the writings of the ancient Greeks and Roman authors and the actual archaeological finds which are the testimonies of the Thracian religious life². None of the above deities worshipped in Thrace³ and described in Herodotus’ book had so many votive reliefs like the Thracian Hero-Rider, fact which testifies the importance and the central role of the Horseman’s cult not only into Thracian’s religion but also to the others lining in the area⁴.

The cult of the Thracian Horseman or Thracian Hero or Heros Equitans⁵ as it is also known, is a conventional term to reflect a distinctive iconography of a horseman which was widespread in the Black Sea region and the Balkan Peninsula; notably in Thrace, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Scythia and Lower Moesia during the Roman times. The notion was first introduced by A. Dumont in 1836 as “le cavalier Thrace” applying to votive tablets or reliefs found in the area of ancient Thrace (map.1)⁶. The scientists and scholars soon adopted the term and today the horseman is connected with at least 3000 archaeological artifacts discovered, not only in the area of ancient Thrace but also in other areas like Greece and Rome. The archaeologists have

¹ Herodotus, “*Ιστορίαι*”, Book 5.7.1

² D. Boteva 2002, p. 817

³ According to Herodotus the geographical boundaries of the Kingdom of Thrace were the Euxine Pontus to the East, the Aegean Sea to the south and Danube River to the North (4.99.1-2), Strymon River (5.23.1) and mount Disoron to the West (5.17.2).

⁴ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p.204.

⁵ Boteva D. 2011, p. 85

⁶ Dumont A. 1882, p.70.

discovered marble or stone relief plaques, statues and statuettes made by marble or bronze all connected with the cult of the Thracian Hero⁷. The dimensions of the relief plaques vary but the most typical size is 30-40 cm wide and 20-30 cm high. In the majority there is usually a frame surrounding the relief and an arch on the top of the plaque⁸. On the scene it is depicted a rider on a horse, usually turned to the right and rarely to the left, wearing chiton and a waving cape-chlamys⁹. The horse is galloping, walking or standing. The majority of the scholars accepted the idea of G. Kazarow and V. Hoffiller to classify the motif of the Thracian Rider into three basic categories¹⁰;

- I. **Type A** The Rider is presented on a walking or standing horse, usually facing a woman behind of an altar and a snake-entwined tree (fig.2).
- II. **Type B** The horseman galloping and attacking a boar usually accompanied by a dog (fig.3).
- III. **Type C** The horseman returning from hunting, carrying a deer. In addition, there are many variants, and for many scholars the type C is considered as a subtype of type B. (fig.4)

There is no strict geographical or temporal pattern in the distribution of these types. However, Dumont's decision to call it Thracian was probably based on the fact that more than 2000 of these finds were discovered in 350 locations in Thrace and neighboring areas that was inhabited by Thracians or was under Thracian influence¹¹. The variety of the depictions of the Thracian Horseman along with the extended area the archaeologists have discovered the same motif is an undisputable proof that the Rider was probably one the most important figure of the religious culture in the western Black Sea basin¹². The Rider was not only a specific Thracian phenomenon but had an important and highly respected place in the religious life of the whole population living in the region; Greeks, Romans, Scythians, Thracians. Unfortunately,

⁷ Boteva D. 2011,p.85

⁸ Dimitrova N.2002, p. 209

⁹ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p.205.

¹⁰ Boteva D. 2011, p.95.

¹¹ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.210

¹² Boteva D. 2011, p.85

the Thracians left no written source and this fact makes the effort of the scholars and archaeologists more difficult in order to understand and interpret correctly the cult of the Thracian Horseman expressed in the memorial monuments discovered in the area of the Western Black Sea¹³.

Fortunately one third of these monuments have inscriptions. The inscriptions are either votive, which covers about the two thirds of the samples, or funerary. The usual typical form of the inscriptions is below the relief, written in Greek or Roman language which is an undeniable proof that not only the Thracians worshipped the Rider but also Greeks and Romans. However, there are examples especially on the funerary reliefs that a part of the inscription is located on the top of the relief and continues below the image of the Thracian Hero (fig.5). The form of the inscriptions is more often presented with the following way; the name of the deity in the dative, followed by the names of the people who dedicated the monument if it is a votive relief or the name of the deceased if it is a funerary relief in the nominative. In the second case before the name of the dead is preceded the inscription “*Dis Manibus*” or “*Θεοῖς Καταχθόνιοις*” and followed by typical funerary-epitaphial information or the word “*εὐχή*”¹⁴. The straightforward meaning of the inscriptions on the Thracian Horseman monuments not only provides the scholars with a trustworthy way to verify the identity, iconography and cult of the Thracian Hero but in addition they are the only credible evidence to distinguish the votive from the funerary monuments¹⁵.

The majority of the monuments are dated to the Hellenistic and Roman period. The motif of the Thracian Horseman is present in all the sanctuaries located in the provinces of Thrace and Moesia inferior from the 2nd century B.C., when the region was not a part of the Roman Empire, until the 3rd century A.D. All the sanctuaries are located generally in high places like hills, mountains and slopes and quite close to a mineral spring or a river¹⁶. Very often there was also a cave close by where the rituals connected with afterlife and the chthonic nature of the Thracian Hero performed by the clerics and the worshippers. The whole sanctuary usually had an enclosure, a fenced area. Inside there was the altar in front of the temple (fig.6). In addition, it is

¹³ Boteva D. 2011, p.86.

¹⁴ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p.205

¹⁵ Dimitrova N. 2002, p. 209-210.

¹⁶ Boteva D. 2011, p.92.

interesting that other deities¹⁷ were also worshipped in the same sanctuary along with the Thracian Hero. Based on the number of archaeological finds some of the most important sanctuaries of the Thracian Hero in the Western Black Sea region are located in Glava Panega, Slivnica, Pernic, Batkun, Dyadovo, Kallatis, Messimbria, Histria, Tomis and the area of Galata(map 2)¹⁸.

However, the cult of the Heroised Dead was existed long before that period, back to 8th century B.C or even earlier. The most ancient representations of the Hero-Rider are dated back to 5th century B.C. and have clear influences from Macedonia and Asia Minor but all of them were bronze, silver or gold material (appliqués, coins and gold rings). It was not until the 3rd century B.C. that the Horseman started to appear in marble or stone slab reliefs. The swift to the material is possibly a product of the cultural interactions between Thracians and Greeks. After the ages of co-existence there was a fusion in the motif of the Hero. The Thracians adopted the Greek marble artwork in their religious life and dedicate votive reliefs to their god. It is only natural that in the early representations the Thracian horseman motif lacks the well-built structure and feature that can be seen in later depictions¹⁹.

¹⁷ Asclepius and Hygieia, Apollo, Dionysus, Sabazios, Cybele, Artemis-Diana are only some of the deities that shared the same temple with the Thracian Hero.

¹⁸ Other sanctuaries of the Thracian Hero in the Western Black Sea region are located in; Draganovec, Plastina, Ljublen, Pascalevec, Trancovica, Brestnica, Liljace, Ezerovo, Kran, Lozen.

¹⁹ <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100136992/archeologists-discover-one-of-the-earliest-representations-of-thracian-horseman>

CHAPTER II

The Thracian Nature of the Hero

2.1 The Heroised Dead

Even though the existence of so many archaeological finds (reliefs, statues, rings, coins) there is no inscription, written source or any other historical record to testify the identity of the horseman. There is no safe way for the scholars to say if it is a depiction of a God or a demigod or even a heroised dead who is the intermediate messenger “*ἄγγελος*” between the mortals and immortals²⁰.

It is known by the Homeric poems that the tradition of the heroised dead existed in Greece from the 8th century B.C. It is even possible that it was a tradition that started during the Mycenaean era and continued the following years as the cult of the dead²¹. According to Farnell the offerings and sacrifices to the dead are a clear indication for the existence of the cult of the dead and its practices. It was probably a rite which ghosts were called up and questioned about the future²². However, the ancient Greeks were not accepting the possibility that a common mortal could become immortal or even a god. Only Greek heroes who were offsprings of a god like Hercules, Achilles and Dioscourai could overcome the levels of humanity and become half gods and half ghosts after their death. All the above heroes are very much related with the foundation of major ancient Greek colonies in the Black Sea; Heraclea Pontica, Island of Achilles and Dioscurias (map 3).

Furthermore, many other heroes are linked with the foundations of colonies in the Black Sea area were also worshipped as gods after their death. The myth of the local Hero-God usually has a divine origin but it can also come from as an offspring from a human heroic type. A characteristic example is the case of Autolycus, a hero from Thessaly and a member of the Argonauts. According to the tradition Autolycus and his brothers Flogius founded the city of Sinope on the Southern coast of the Black Sea where the two brothers were worshipped as gods after they died. It is known from Strabo that there was a statue of Autolycus, probably above his grave, which after the

²⁰ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p. 205.

²¹ Nilsson M.P. 1967, p.378-383

²² Farnell Lewis R. 1996, p. 26-27.

conquest of Sinope was carried away by Lucullus to Rome. Ancient sources also mention a famous oracle of Autolycus in the city of Sinope²³.

It is obvious that in the cult of the Heroised Dead the local hero is ascended and can wield divine powers of healing, predicting the future, protecting people from natural disasters and enemies. The practice of the hero founder worshipped as a god was widely spread all over the Black Sea area. The followers that participated in the heroised dead cult used to connect the Hero with specific places and regions (the tomb of the Hero or a mountain, cave, fountain) and used that place as a sanctuary. In addition, they used to give the Hero an epithet that declared the name or the quality of that region²⁴. In the Greek tradition the Heroised dead was usually depicted with a horse or sometimes on the horseback, an image that fascinated the Thracians because they were famous horse breeders. The archaeological finds testify that even from the Hellenistic period they adopted and modulated the cult in their religion and their heroes²⁵.

²³ Manoledakis M. 2010, p.564-570.

²⁴ Burkert W. 1993,p.428

²⁵ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.227

2.2 The Heroised Dead Melsas

The cult of the eponymous Hero Melsas is an excellent example to confirm that the cult of the Heroised Dead connected with the foundation of a city was also attested in the Western Black Sea basin. Melsas, according to the ancient written sources, was the legendary Hero founder of the Doric colony Mesembria, modern Nessebar, in the Western Black Sea coast. Strabo in his book refers to the city as “*the city of Mena*”²⁶. *Mena* is a word of combination: The first part is the founder’s name Melsas and the second is the Thracian word for city²⁷. Strabo is not the only one accepting Melsas as the legendary founder of Mesembria. Nicolaus of Damascus²⁸ and Pseudo Symeon in his book “*Chronography*”²⁹ also support the same theory, even though these testimonies were written many centuries after the foundation of Mesembria.

The origin of the unusual name Melsas is not clearly verified. Based on the information from the written sources mentioned above, the majority of the scholars accept that the Hero founder of the city was of Thracian origin. Nevertheless, it is difficult to examine with certainty the mythical versus the real nature of Melsas and to conclude if he was a real person or just a figment in the mind of the citizens³⁰.

The earlier archaeological evidence confirming the cult of the Heroised dead Melsas is mainly attested on the coins minted in Mesembria (fig.7) and dated to the 5th century B.C.³¹ On the obverse side of a silver diobol there is displayed the frontal image of a head with a Corinthian helmet. On the reverse side there is depicted a radiate wheel with the inscription “*M E Σ A*” between the spokes³². In addition, the *theophoric* name *Melseon* is preserved on inscriptions discovered in Mesembria and Dionysopolis and dated to the 3rd and 2nd century B.C.³³

Furthermore, the most interesting testimony about the cult of Melsas is attested on a funeral grave stele epigram, discovered in the city of Mesembria and dated to the

²⁶ Strabo,7.6.1

²⁷ Petrova A. 2013, p.125

²⁸ <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V11N1/chiekova.html>

²⁹ Pseudo-Syemon 706,12

³⁰ Petrova A. 2013, p.125

³¹ Petrova A. 2013, p.125

³² http://www.s110120695.websitehome.co.uk/PHP/SNG_PHP/04_03_Reply.php?Series=SNGuk&AccessionNo=0300_1207

³³ Petrova A. 2013, p.125

Roman period³⁴. On the stele there is a dedicative inscription to Melsas; “ἐνθάδε ἐγὼ
κεῖμε Ἑκάτη θεὸς ὡς ἐσορᾶς · | ἤμην τὸ πάλαι βροτός, νῦν δὲ ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρω · |
Ἰουλία Νεικίου θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος ἀνδρός, | Μεσεμβρία {²⁶Μεσημβρία}²⁶ δέ μιν
{²⁶μοι}²⁶ πατρὶς ἀπὸ Μ(?)]έλσα καὶ βρία · | ζήσασα ἔτη ὅσα μοι στήλη κατέχει · | τρὶς
πέντε δὲ [ε]ἴκοσι καὶ δέκα πέντε. | εὐτυχεῖτε · παροδῖται”³⁵. It is intriguing that the
deceased Ioulia daughter of Neikiou is represented as Hecate. Additionally, the
relatives choose to dedicate the grave stele to the Hero founder of Mesembria and not
any other Greek or Roman god something which proves that the cult of Melsas was
still remained in practice during the Roman period (2nd-3rd century A.D)³⁶.

³⁴ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.226

³⁵ “I rest here, Hecate the goddess, as you see. Before I was mortal, now I am immortal and undecaying, Ioulia, daughter of Nikios, the greathearted man; my fatherland is Mesembria, name formed from Melsa and bria. I lived as many years as the stele shows: 3 times 25 and 15. May you prosper.” IGBulg I² 1970, 345

³⁶ Petrova A. 2013, p.126

2.3 A Thracian Heroised Dead; The case of Rhesus

The cult of the Heroised dead and the beliefs about the immortality of the soul were especially attracted to the Thracians. Both of them are clearly attested in the ancient texts in the tragedy of “Rhesus” which is attributed to Euripides.

Rhesus according to Homer was the king of Thrace and son of king Eioneus. In later writers Rhesus is identified as an offspring of the river-god Strymon and the muse Euterpe, protector of lyric poetry. According to the myth Rhesus was raised by fountain nymphs³⁷. He fought on the side of Trojans and he was famous for the “*white as snow and swift as the wind*” horses he had in his possession. In the book 10 of Iliad Rhesus was killed in his tent by Diomedes and his horses were carried off by Odysseus (fig.8)³⁸.

In the tragedy of Euripides the muse Euterpe, Rhesus’ mother, declares that her son is not going to die but rather continue his existence as “*ανθρωποδαίμων*”, meaning take the form of half human and half god. The muse also advocates that her son is going to live in a subterranean cavern on mount Pangaion and become a priest or a prophet of Bacchus;

My son shall not be laid in any grave
Of darkness; thus much guerdon will I crave
Of Death's eternal bride, the heavenly-born
Maid of Demeter, Life of fruits and corn,
To set this one soul free. She owes me yet,
For Orpheus widowed, an abiding debt.
To me he still must be--that know I well--
As one in death, who sees not. Where I dwell
He must not come, nor see his mother's face.
Alone for ever, in a caverned place
Of silver-veined earth, hid from men's sight,
A Man yet Spirit, he shall live in light:
As under far Pangaion Orpheus lies,
Priest of great light and worshipped of the wise.

(Euripides, Rhesus 962-973).

³⁷ <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/RhesusOfThrace.html>

³⁸ Homer, “The Iliad” book 10 435, 495.

Other information about the cult of Rhesus comes from Philostratus. In his book “*Heroicus*”³⁹ he presents Rhesus as a hunter, warrior and horse breeder. Furthermore, the author mentions that an altar on mount Rhodope dedicated to the demigod Rhesus where wild animals offer themselves willingly for sacrifice. Moreover, Rhesus as a local Thracian deity was considered as a healer and savior from the plague and pestilence in the area of mount Rhodope. Furthermore, as a priest of Bacchus and cousin of Orpheus it is only natural to assume that his mystic cult was perpetual connected with the Orphic mysteries⁴⁰.

The myth of Rhesus and the Hero Equitans share many similarities. First of all they have both healing powers and they share the same rare motif. They possess the nature of warriors-killers and healers at the same time. In addition, the horse has an important semiotic meaning for the both of them. Rhesus is described as a famous horse breeder and master of beautiful horses. Furthermore, Rhesus is presented as skillful hunter of wild animals and the Thracian Horseman in the votive and funerary reliefs of type B is depicted also as a hunter of boars, hares and stags.

Another similarity between Rhesus and the Hero Equitans is the connection with the world of the dead. Both deities are chthonic figures and generally associated with the underworld (Rhesus as a cave dweller and the Horseman as leader of the dead)⁴¹.

In addition, another similarity between the two cults is presented on a votive relief discovered in a sanctuary of the Nymphs at Bourdara near Pazardzic (fig.9). Even though there is a depiction of the Thracian Horseman, based on the inscription above the scene “[*κυρί]αις Νύμφαις*”⁴² the relief is dedicated to the Nymphs. The relief is 0.22m high, 0.205m wide and 0.03m thick⁴³ and is dated to the Roman period. Unfortunately only a small part is saved. On the scene there is depicted the mounted Thracian Hero, with a three quarter face and a beard, advancing to the right. Only the head of the horse has been remained and the top of the tree. It is important to remember that according to a version of the myth the nymphs fostered Rhesus as a baby.⁴⁴

³⁹ Philostratus, “*Heroicus*”, p. 680.

⁴⁰ Liapis V., 2011, p.95-98.

⁴¹ Liapis V.2011, p.101-102

⁴² IGBulg III 1964,1368

⁴³ Opperman M. 2006, p.353

⁴⁴ Dimitrova N.2002, p.219

Even though there is no inscription dedicated to them, the nymphs are also presented in another votive relief discovered in Philippopolis. It is dated to the 3rd century A.D. today is displayed in the Plovdiv museum (fig.10)⁴⁵. The upper part of the relief is destroyed and it is impossible to know if there was any inscription. On the right part of the scene there is a male figure, probably the servant of the Thracian Rider, depicted with full face. In front of him there is the Thracian Hero, mounted on galloping horse and advancing to the right. The hero is depicted with a three quarter face and he is dressed with chlamys and chiton. He is holding a deer in his low right hand and the brindles with his left arm (type C.). Below the horse there is an animal fight scene. A hound and a lion are attacking the deer. In front of the Rider, on the left part of the relief, there are three female standing figures, probably the nymphs, dressed with himation and veils over their head. Behind the nymphs it is depicted a temple which is a clear indication that there was a temple in the area dedicated both to the Thracian Hero and the nymphs.

Vasilis Liapis in his research makes another etymological approach to support his argument for the identification of Rhesus as a Hero Horseman. According to Liapis the origin of the word Rhesus (Ρήσος) is the word “ῥῆσος” which according to the Thracian culture means lord, an epithet that very often is addressed also to the Thracian Hero. Liapis is admitting that the evidences are not currently available enough for the association between the Hero Equitans and Rhesus. However, he remarks that one day his hypothesis could be confirmed if the similarities and parallelisms mentioned above are reinforced with other archaeological finds⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ https://c2.staticflickr.com/6/5122/5208792919_410cc1b95d_b.jpg

⁴⁶ Liapis V.2011, p.103-104

2.4 The Immortal Heroised Dead; The Case of Zalmoxis

Another case of a Thracian religious culture connected with the cult of the Heroised Dead and the belief about the immortality of the soul is the cult of Zalmoxis. Herodotus in his fourth book “*Ἱστορίαι*” writes about the cult of Zalmoxis and the Thracian tribe Getae who believed that they were immortals⁴⁷.

The Getae tribe and Thracians believed that they could accomplish immortality by sending a messenger, chosen by lot every five years, to their god Zalmoxis. According to their religious tradition the envoy was chosen in the following procedure; three lances are held by men thereto appointed. Others seize the messenger to Salmoxis by his hands and feet, and swing and hurl him aloft on to the spear-point. If he was killed by the spears, they believed that the gods regard them with favor. If he was not killed, they blamed the messenger himself, deeming him a bad man, and send another messenger in the place of him whom they blamed. While the man was still alive his countrymen charged him with the message (fig.11)⁴⁸. That way the Getae believed that the envoy did not die but he continued to exist as immortal next to Zalmoxis. Later authors provide us with additional information about the Thracians. Pomponius Mela describes them as savages who delighted offer their lives to meet with the dead. The Thracians also believed that their souls do not perish and could even return after their death. Other Thracian tribes believed that the soul was imprisoned inside the human body and they welcomed death as a good fortune and freedom. They believed that it was better to die rather than continue living because the soul was liberated after their death⁴⁹. For this reason some tribes lament and mourn when new babies were brought to life.

⁴⁷ “Their belief in their immortality is as follows: they believe that they do not die, but that one who perishes goes to the deity Salmoxis, or Gebeleizis, as some of them call him. Once every five years they choose one of their people by lot and send him as a messenger to Salmoxis, with instructions to report their needs; and this is how they send him: three lances are held by designated men; others seize the messenger to Salmoxis by his hands and feet, and swing and toss him up on to the spear-points. If he is killed by the toss, they believe that the god regards them with favor; but if he is not killed, they blame the messenger himself, considering him a bad man, and send another messenger in place of him. It is while the man still lives that they give him the message. Furthermore, when there is thunder and lightning these same Thracians shoot arrows skyward as a threat to the god, believing in no other god but their own.”, Herodotus 4.94.1-4.94.4, translated in <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D4%3Achapter%3D94%3Asection%3D4>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.mircea-eliade.com/from-primitives-to-zen/036.html>

⁴⁹ Pomponius Mela, “De Chorographia”, 2.18

Referring to the god Zalmoxis, Porphyry from Tyre in his book writes that according to the Greeks living in the area of Hellespont, Zalmoxis was once a slave of the famous Pythagoras on the island of Samos who set him free. After his liberation, Zalmoxis returned to his homeland where he built a banquet hall “*Ἀνδρεών*” where only the best men⁵⁰ gathered. In this banquet he preached about the immortality of the soul⁵¹. The Thracians lived simple hard lives and it was easy for Zalmoxis, who lived among the wisest Greeks, to impress them with his talents as a seer⁵². He finally managed to convince them that neither his guests nor their descendants would ever die, but instead they would go to a place where they could live forever in absolute happiness⁵³. In the meantime during these teachings he constructed an underground chamber and when it was finished he dwelled hidden from his countrymen for three years. The Thracians mourned for him and at the fourth year he returned to them, proclaimed that he resurrected and came back to them. According to Strabo he became a priest and dwelt in a cavernous mountain which was sacred to his followers. Zalmoxis was considered God’s representative on earth until he declared himself also a god⁵⁴. He was included with the famous seers and healers of antiquity among Trophonius, Amphiaraus, Musaeus and Orpheus⁵⁵. Moreover, concerning his cult the high priest of Zalmoxis was also considered to possess great healing powers and he was famous physicians⁵⁶. Of course for the Greeks lining close to the Getae tribe, the case of Zalmoxis was an exceptional example to prove their intelligent superiority towards the Thracians tribes and stretch the boundaries between them as civilized and the others as barbarians⁵⁷.

It is only natural to assume that the Thracians unanimously valued voluntary death⁵⁸. This is possibly the main reason the Greeks considered them as barbarians. It is intriguing that some of the Thracian tribes, the Agathyrsi for example were considered as tribes with barbarism ethics and customs⁵⁹. The information that the ancient writers provide us about the religious beliefs of the Thracians concerning the

⁵⁰ Ξυδόπουλος Ι.Κ. 2007, p.106

⁵¹ Porphyry, “*Vita Pythag*”, 14.

⁵² Strabo, 7.3.5

⁵³ Dimitrova N.2002, p.225

⁵⁴ Ustinova Y. 2009, p.270

⁵⁵ Strabo, 7.67

⁵⁶ Ustinova Y. 2009, p.270

⁵⁷ Ξυδόπουλος Ι.Κ. 2007, p.107-108

⁵⁸ Solinus, “*Collectanea rerum memorabiliorum*”, 10.2-3

⁵⁹ Ξυδόπουλος Ι.Κ. 2007, p.104

immortality of the soul is also confirmed by archaeological data and epigraphical evidence. In Northeast Bulgaria, the land of the Getae, the archaeologists discovered an inscription in a Thracian tomb⁶⁰: “ἐνθα Δινς ἀνέθετο Ρησκουπορεος Ἡρωι ὑπὲρ ζωῆς πελλόμενος τέκνοιο Νύμφης {²⁶Νύμφαις} ²⁶ τε κούραις θεαῖς εὐζάμενος· ἐγένετο πολυλάατος ἥρωος ἀθάνατος. ἐν δὲ Ρόδοισι ρόδον ἐπιχεύσατε”⁶¹.

Based on the inscription G. Mihailov believes that the deceased has become an immortal hero. The heroised dead, just like the Thracian Horseman, became the envoy to deliver the message to the gods and continue his existence among the gods or even become a god himself⁶². It is interesting that the grave monument is also a votive one. It is certain that the tomb belongs to a Thracian aristocrat because the name “Δινης” has a Thracian origin. The word “ἀθάνατος” have never been used in Greek grave monuments. Only in “*Anthologia Graeca*” 12.294, Homer is referred as “ἀθάνατος ἴσος ἥρωος”. Nonetheless, in this case the word “ἀθάνατος” is used to indicate the significance of the dead as a hero equal to the gods which is totally different with the heroised dead who became immortal hero like the Thracian Rider or the followers of Zalmoxis and Rhesus⁶³. In ancient Greece only the followers of the Pythagoreans and those who had initiated to the Orphic mysteries believed that the human beings bore a mortal body (Titan’s nature) and an immortal soul (Zagreus nature). According to their doctrines, the participants of the Orphic mysteries experienced a ritual horrible death. After their initiation they could understand the true meaning of life, anticipating physical death when they could be truly liberated from mortal bondage and expect a special treatment in the afterlife. They believed that in the underworld they could experience some kind of apotheosis or redemption from the “wheel of calamities”⁶⁴.

⁶⁰ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.225

⁶¹ “*Here Dinis, son of Reskouporis, who outlived his child, dedicated [a monument] to the hero and the goddesses nymphs, after praying [to them]. He [the deceased] became a famous immortal hero*”

IGBulg II 1951, 796

⁶² IGBulg II1951, 179

⁶³ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.226

⁶⁴ Hinge G. 2008, p. 389

CHAPTER III

The Thracian Horseman: Religious Syncretism with Gods in the Western Black Sea Area

In the previous chapter of the heroised dead I mentioned that the identity of the Thracian Horseman is unknown. The majority of scholars agree that the deity depicted as the Thracian Horseman is an advanced case of culture and religious syncretism consolidated with the divine powers of almost every Greek, Roman or any other deity in Asia Minor⁶⁵. This hypothesis derives from the magical powers and attributes ascribed to the Thracian Hero by his followers and worshippers.

On the majority of the votive reliefs on the inscriptions the Thracian Rider is referred as “*ἥρωας, θεός, κύριος, πάτριος, πατρώος, σώζων, σωτήρ, προπύλαιος*”. Sometimes the epithets *ἥρωας* and *θεός* are combined together or used interchangeably. In addition, on others votive reliefs is referred with different epithets; “*ἄγριος, ἀρχηγέτης, ἐπήκοος, θαυματουργός, ἰσχυρός, καταχθόνιος*”.⁶⁶ In Roman reliefs he is addressed like “*deus, augustus, donimus, invictus, sanctus*” epithets that they are also combined as; *Deo Heroni, Deo sancto Hero*⁶⁷.

Some of the epithets mentioned above usually are attached also to Greek or Roman gods; Zeus, Hera, Artemis, Dionysus, Hephaestus and Dioscouroi. Some of these gods are also presented on votive reliefs of the Thracian Hero a fact that testifies without any objection the religious syncretism of the Thracian Rider with other deities⁶⁸.

Oppermann believes that “*the Thracian Hero was a multifunctional god, a protective deity with local character*”⁶⁹. An important fact to support his theory is based on the many epithets ascribed to the Thracian Hero with a local Thracian character: *Ἀυλαρχηνός, Ἀυλωνεΐτης, Γεριηνός, Ζεινδρουμηνός, Ζυμιδρηνός, Κενσίδρηνός, Παλαδεινηνός, Σολδοβυσσηνός, Σολδοκεληνός, Σουΐτιλινο, Βεργιδενθής, Βασκιδιθίας, Βδήκουρος, Βετέσπιος, Βουρκηθίας, Κυραίκνης, Ουτάσπιος, Πυρμυρούλας, Πυρμυρούλας*⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Dimitrova N.2002, p.210-211

⁶⁶ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p. 205

⁶⁷ Dimitrova N. 2002, p. 210

⁶⁸ Grbic D. 2013, p.14.

⁶⁹ Opperman M. 2006, p. 276

⁷⁰ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p. 206

Many of these epithets are referring to places and landscapes where the cult of the Thracian Hero was exceptionally popular. The most interesting thing is that between the Greek gods and these Thracian epithets there is a special connection. In the majority of the inscriptions saved on the votive reliefs these epithets accompany the name of the god depicted as a Thracian Rider⁷¹. The worshippers felt the necessity to include Thracian religious elements to the Greek and Roman Gods in order to be acceptable by everyone.

⁷¹ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, π. 206

3.1 Asclepius and Hygieia

The Thracian Horseman was primarily a healing deity and considered a savior (*σώζων-σωτήρ*) something that explains the fusion with the Greek healing gods Apollo Iatros, Asclepius and Hygieia. The strong connection between the Thracian Hero and these specific Greek deities is attested on the inscriptions and the reliefs the archaeologists had discovered all over the western Black Sea region and the Balkan Peninsula. On a rectangular votive relief found in Krupac in Serbia (fig.12), there is the depiction of two identical horsemen facing each other; the one is advancing to the right and the other to the left. They are depicted with three quarter faces, mounted on calm walking horses. The riders are holding the bristles of their horses with both hands and they are dressed with chiton and chlamys. In between the two horsemen there is a snake-entwined tree and an altar (type A). The relief is 0.25m high, 0.34m wide and 0.04m thick and is dated to the Roman period probably around 2nd-3rd century A.D.⁷²

On the relief there is the inscription; “*Ἀπόλλωνι και Ἀσκληπιῶ Βερακεληνοις Γάιος Πρόκλου ἐυζάμενος ἀνέθηκε*”.⁷³ It is interesting that on the inscription there is the name of only one person who dedicated the votive relief (Γάιος Πρόκλου) but he decided to depict both healing gods as Thracian Horsemen and not follow the typical form of “Type A” category. In addition, this relief excludes any possibility that the dedicator wanted to depict himself as a heroised dead in the form of a Thracian Horseman⁷⁴. It is only logical to assume that without the inscription we could not understand the deities on the relief. The scholars could easily be confused by the two horsemen and assume that there are displayed the Dioskouroi, not Apollo and Asclepius. The relief is 0.25m high 0.34m wide 0.04m thick and it is dated to the 2nd century A.D and today is in Pirot museum in Serbia⁷⁵.

The inscription above the scene provides additional information regarding the cult of the Thracian Rider as a healing deity. In general the dedicators of the reliefs usually choose the words “*εὐχάσ*” or “*εὐχῆν*” or “*εὐζάμενος*” in order to adjure the deity, grant them and their family with health and prosperity. It is interesting that for the

⁷² Opperman M. 2006, p.327

⁷³ Dimitrova N.2002, p.218.

⁷⁴ Dimitrova N.2002, p.218.

⁷⁵ Opperman M. 2006, p. 327

Thracians, especially for the farmers and the stockbreeders, the Thracian Hero was also considered a protective god for their animals and flocks. He was worshipped as a “divine veterinarian” but unfortunately no votive or funerary inscription has yet discovered to testify this aspect of his nature⁷⁶. Nevertheless, there are hundreds other votive reliefs discovered in the Western Black Sea to testify the special bond between the Thracian Hero and the Greek healing deities but the one found in Krupac is the only with the depiction of Asclepius and Apollo together.

One of the most representative reliefs to confirm the religious syncretism between the Thracian Hero and the cult of Asclepius and Hygieia was discovered in Izvorovo, near Carasura in the Chirpan district area (fig.13). On the right part of the relief is depicted the Thracian Rider in a three quarter face, mounted on a calm walking horse and advancing to the right (Type A). He is clad with chlamys and chiton, holding the brindles with both of his hands. In the center of the relief there is an altar and next to it stands Hygieia depicted at a young age with full face, dressed with chiton and himation. On the right hand of the goddess there is coiling a snake while on her left hand Hygieia holds a phiale where she gathers snake’s venom for the medicine. On the right side of the relief is depicted Asclepius standing, in a typical Este form. The god is depicted bearded, clad with a heavy himation draped over his right shoulder. Asclepius is extending an egg with his right hand to an entwined snake on a staff. This depiction is rather unique because in the majority of the depictions Asclepius is holding a patera instead of an egg. Furthermore, the specific votive relief is particularly interesting concerning its measurements. The relief is now exhibiting in the archaeological museum of Plovdiv in Philippolis and it is 0.305m high, 0.425m wide and 0.045m thick⁷⁷. Probably the sculptor in order to succeed a better image on the depiction of the scene he decided to make a longer one compared to the typical votive reliefs⁷⁸.

A very interesting case is the votive relief discovered in Batkun in the sanctuary of Asclepius. The god Asclepius is depicted mounted on a galloping horse, turned to the right and holding a spear or a staff (Type B). Beneath the hooves of the horse is not depicted one of the typical wild animals, a boar or a lion, but an entwined snake with

⁷⁶ Σαμοθράκης Α.1963, p. 206

⁷⁷ Opperman M. 2006, p.325

⁷⁸ Moschakis K. 2013, p. 54

a beard close to an altar (fig.14). Furthermore, it is intriguing that the snake is not entwined on a tree like in the type A reliefs but on the Rider's staff. Unfortunately the top of the relief is severely damaged and the face of the god is not visible just like his clothes. Furthermore, we cannot know if there was any inscription above the scene. Nevertheless, it is clear that the sculptor tried to fuse the basic symbols of the two deities, the Horse and the general motif of the Thracian Hero with entwined serpent on the staff of Asclepius⁷⁹.

Additionally, a group of votive reliefs that certifies the connection between the two healing deities was discovered in the sanctuary of Asclepius *Σαλδηνός* in Glava Panega of the Vraca region in Northwest Bulgaria. Totally there were discovered more than forty votive reliefs with the depiction of the Thracian Horseman but I am going to analyze the most important reliefs discovered in the area of the sanctuary based on the inscriptions, confirming the religious syncretism between the two cults.

One of the most interesting votive relief based on the inscription below the main scene is dedicated both to Asclepius and Aphrodite: “[*Ἀσκλη*]πιῶ καὶ *Ἀφροδείτη* *χαριστήριον*”⁸⁰ (fig.15). The Thracian Rider is turned to the right, mounted on a calm walking horse and holding a patera in his right hand (Type A). He is depicted with a full face and he is dressed with chlamys. In front of him there is a standing female figure depicted also with a full face, on the same height, clad in chiton, mantle and a veil over her head⁸¹. We can only assume that the female figure is Aphrodite and the rider is Asclepius. It is certain that they are equals, based on the same height the sculptor decided to depict them. The relief is 0.20m high 0.20m wide and 0.035m thick⁸². It is dated to the 3rd century A.D. and was discovered together with other reliefs of the Thracian Horseman and numerous other dedications to Asclepius.

Among the votive reliefs discovered in Glava Panega there is one with an arched top (fig.16) representing Asclepius as the Thracian Hero mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right. The Rider is dressed in chlamys and chiton, depicted with a three quarter face and he is holding a deer in his right low hand which is attacked by a lion. The Hero is accompanied by the typical hound which is attacking the lion in

⁷⁹ Moschakis K.2013,p. 73

⁸⁰ IGBulg II 1951, 569

⁸¹ Dimitrova N.2002, p.217

⁸² Opperman M. 2006, p.327

order to protect the deer (Type C). On the scene of the relief there are also two standing women in front of the Rider depicted with a full face. Their clothes are not visible but probably they are clad with a veil on their head. In addition, a male figure is also depicted behind the Thracian Hero, probably a servant. He is dressed also with a chlamys and his face is depicted in three quarters.

Above the scene there is the inscription with the dedication to Asclepius “*θ[εῶ] ἐ[πηκό]ω Σαλτοβουση[νω]*”⁸³ and below the inscription with the name of the Roman dedicator praying to the god “*Μάρκος Λούκιος <ς> κικίτωρ εὐχὴν*”. Below the scene there is a frieze with a depiction of an animal’s fight scene. The relief is 0.425m high 0.38m wide 0.04m thick⁸⁴.

Additionally, another three votive reliefs of the Thracian Horseman discovered also in the same spot. The first one is an arched top relief with the Thracian Rider mounted on a galloping horse, turned to the right hunting a boar and accompanied with the dog (type B). The Hero is dressed with the typical chlamys and he is holding a spear in his right raised hand. In front of him there is an altar and the entwined snake on a tree⁸⁵. Above the scene there is the dedicative inscription to Asclepius; “*κυρίω Ἀσκληπιῶ Σαλδοκεληνω*” and below the inscription with the name of the dedicator “*Φλ(άβιος) Ροδοπιανὸς χαριστήριον*”⁸⁶ (fig.17). The relief measures 0.455m high 0.35m wide 0.075m thick⁸⁷.

The second one is a rectangular relief (fig.18) with the Thracian Rider mounted on a calm walking horse (type A). The Hero is depicted with a full face, dressed with chiton and chlamys. He is holding the martingales with both hands and advancing to the right. In front of him there is a female figure, probably a goddess, clad with himation and depicted with a full face. Between them there is an entwined snake on the tree and an altar⁸⁸. The inscription on the relief is “*κυρίω Ἀσκληπιῶ καὶ Ὑγείᾳ Σαλδηνοίς*”⁸⁹. Probably the Rider is Asclepius but Aphrodite in this relief is replaced

⁸³ IGBulgII 1951, 530

⁸⁴ Opperman M. 2006, p.351

⁸⁵ Dobruski V. 1907, p.61

⁸⁶ IGBulgII 1951, 531

⁸⁷ Opperman M. 2006, p.334

⁸⁸ Dobruski 1907, p.68

⁸⁹ IGBulg 1951, 529

by his daughter Hygieia. The relief measures 0.30m high, 0.33m wide, and 0.05m thick⁹⁰.

The third relief found in the sanctuary of Glava Panega is remarkably interesting (fig.19). The relief is dedicated to the god Asclepius and Hygieia according to the inscription above the scene: “*κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῷ Σαλδοουισσηνῶ καὶ Ὑγείᾳ*” and it is 0.52m high, 0.335m wide and 0.055m thick⁹¹. The relief has a pediment with acroteria as a top. On the main scene Asclepius is depicted as the Hero hunter with full face, mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right. He is dressed in chiton and chlamys. He is holding a spear in his raised right hand and the brindles with his left hand. Below the horse there is the hound chasing a boar near an altar. In front of the Thracian Rider there is displayed a standing female figure, probably a goddess, with full face, dressed in a himation and a veil over her head. Above the standing woman there is a tree and an entwined snake on it.

Below the main scene there is a frieze with a depiction of four wild animals; a boar, a doe, a bull and a deer running towards the relief’s right side. Some scholars suggested the opinion that these animals offer themselves willingly for a sacrifice, especially with the bull kneeling underneath the altar depicted on the upper side of the relief. Based on this image the scholars see similarities and connection between Asclepius as a Thracian Hero and the cult of Rhesus. However, other scholars express the opinion of a depiction of an animal fight and nothing more⁹².

The rest of the reliefs discovered in the sanctuary of Glava Panega have no dedicative inscriptions to Asclepius or any other gods and they have none iconographical dissimilarity with the reliefs mentioned above⁹³.

⁹⁰ Opperman M. 2006, p.328

⁹¹ Opperman M. 2006, p.339

⁹² Liapis V. 2011,p.102

⁹³ Moschakis K. 2013, p. 67

3.2 Apollo

As it was mentioned above, apart from Asclepius the Thracian Rider assumed features and characteristics of other Greek deities. Apollo was one of the prominent Greek gods that is strongly connected and even acculturated into the Thracian Rider, not only as a religious healing god (Apollo Iatros) but also as a solar deity. One of the most interesting cases testifying the religious syncretism and the iconographical convention between Apollo and the Thracian Horseman is the sanctuary of Apollo Seulamenos at Trud in Plovdiv region. More than twenty votive reliefs dedicated to Apollo and other gods, Asclepius for example, were discovered in the sanctuary. Not all the reliefs have inscriptions and some of them are severely damaged. This is the reason I am going to present the most representative and well preserved, based on the inscriptions connecting Apollo with Thracian Rider.

One of the most well preserved votive reliefs is of type A with a triangular top (fig.20). On the scene it is depicted the Thracian rider mounted on a calm walking horse and wearing chlamys. In front of the Horseman there is an altar and an entwined snake on the tree. The left hand of the Rider is not visible but in his right hand he is holding a patera, making an offering to the snake. Based on this image of the Thracian Horseman, and other with different gods, D. Boteva supported the theory that the Rider is not the supreme divinity in the Thracian pantheon as traditionally claimed by others scholars. According to Boteva the role of the lord of the universe and the supreme god in the Thracian's religious life was the serpent on the tree⁹⁴. The relief has a dedicative inscription to Apollo below the scene “*Ἀπόλλωνι Ζγουλαμηνῶ*” and it is 0.26m high, 0.21m wide, 0.03m thick⁹⁵.

Another votive relief discovered on the same spot, dedicated also to Apollo is representing the Thracian Hero hunting a boar (type B). The relief has an arched top and it measures 0.33m high, 0.29m wide and 0.45m thick⁹⁶. On the scene the Thracian Hero is mounted on a galloping horse, moving to the right, accompanied with a dog, holding a spear to hunt down the boar. In front of him is the typical altar with the entwined snake on the tree (fig.21). The most interesting about this specific relief is that on the scene behind the Hero there is depicted another horseman on a galloping

⁹⁴ Boteva D. 2002, p.818

⁹⁵ Opperman M. 2006,p.325

⁹⁶ Opperman M. 2006,p.336

horse moving to the left. The scene give the impression of a hunting scene just like the paintings in the Macedonian tombs in Vergina (fig.22) or the painting in the tomb of Alexandrovo (fig.23).Furthermore, it is noticeable that the relief is very well preserved and because of that we can see the details of the Hero's curly hair technique which is also applied to represent the mane of the horse on the front. The inscription on the relief above the scene is “ἀγαθῆ τύχη Απόλλωνι Ζγουλαμηνῶ” and the name of the dedicator below “Λουκιανὸς Γαίου εὐχὴν”⁹⁷. The relief is 0.33m high, 0.29m wide and 0.045m thick⁹⁸. In addition, another votive relief of Type B dedicated to Apollo also discovered in the same area. The only difference is that in the place of the boar there is depicted a human warrior struck down by the Thracian Hero (fig.24). The inscription is dedicated again to “κυρίῳ Απόλλωνι” and the relief is 0.30 high 0.28 wide and 0.03 thick meters⁹⁹.

The last representative votive relief discovered in the sanctuary of Trud and dedicated to Apollo is different with the others mentioned above because it is not of the typical Thracian Horseman representation. On the relief there is a standing male figure, which through the inscription above “θεῶ Απόλλωνι ἐπηκόῳ”¹⁰⁰ is identified as Apollo. The interesting is that although the god is in a traditional iconography the person who dedicated the relief “Μάξιμος ἰατρὸς εὐχὴν” felt the necessity to add a horse next to the standing Apollo. It is like the dedicator Maximus felt that the scene was incomplete without the horse¹⁰¹. Of course there is also the opposite case. The image of the Thracian Hero mounted, with no dedicative inscription to Apollo and next to him there is depicted a lyre (fig.25). There are plenty votive reliefs discovered in the sanctuary of Trud with the depiction of the traditional horseless iconography¹⁰² but this only indicates that the worshippers were not satisfied and needed something more. Probably this was the reason that drove them to adopt the Thracian Hero and emerged him with the cult of Apollo. All the reliefs are dated to the Roman era from the 1st to the 3rd century A.D.

⁹⁷ IGBulg III 1961, 1459

⁹⁸ Opperman M. 2006,p.336

⁹⁹ Opperman M. 2006, p.338

¹⁰⁰ IGBulg III 1961, 1467

¹⁰¹ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.217-218

¹⁰² IGBulg III 1961,p.260-261

The religious fusion between the Thracian Horseman and Apollo is also testified on votive reliefs discovered in other places. In the region of the ancient Greek colony of Odessos was discovered a votive relief with the depiction of a mounted Thracian Rider on a calm walking horse (fig.26). The Rider turns to the right, is dressed with chiton and chlamys, holding a patera and in front of him there is an altar with a tree and an entwined snake (type A). On the inscription of the relief above the scene is written: “[θεῶν Ἀπόλλ]λωνι {Ἀπόλλωνι} [Καρ]αβα[σμου]” and below the name of the dedicator “Προμαθίων Α[— — — — —] Ἀμόντωρ Μεν[— — — — —] [— — — — —] Ἄρτεμ[ιδώρου — —] [ἀνέθηκ]αυ.”¹⁰³

Unfortunately, the relief was severely damaged when it was discovered and big part of the inscription is lost. It is 0.51m high, 0.44m wide and 0.15m thick¹⁰⁴. Nevertheless, based on the remaining part of the inscription it is for sure a dedicative relief to Apollo *Καραβασμώ* from *Προμαθίων* in order to honor his daughter or his wife *Ἄρτεμ(ιδώρου)*.

One of the most important aspects in the religious syncretism is the cult of Apollo *γενικῶ* represented as the Thracian Hero. On a votive relief discovered in Zornitsa (fig.27), near the ancient Anchialos, below scene there was the inscription “γενικῶ Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀτίλιος Οὐάλης στρατιώτης λεγ(ιῶνος) [ζ’ {27ια’}27] Κλ(αυδίας) [— — — — —]”¹⁰⁵. The relief is 1.3m high, 0.52m wide, 0.115m thick¹⁰⁶ and based on the name and the profession of the dedicator is dated on the Roman period, probably around 2nd-3rd century A.D.

The relief has a top in the form of a pediment in the interior of which there is a decorative rosette. On the scene below the pediment Apollo is depicted as a Thracian Hero with a three quarter face, mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right. He is clad with chlamys and chiton, holding a spear in his raised right arm (type B). Below the horse there is depicted a hound chasing a wild boar. In front of the Rider there is an altar with a tree and the entwined serpent on it. Under the main scene there is a frieze with an animal’s fight scene.

¹⁰³ IGBulg I² 1970, 79

¹⁰⁴ Opperman M. 2006,p.322

¹⁰⁵ IGBulg III 1964, 1845

¹⁰⁶ Opperman M. 2006, p.354

There are two theories about the epithet *γενικός* given to the god Apollo. The first version is etymological and the epithet is connected with the words *γενέτωρ*, *γεννήτης* and *γενέσιος*, epithets that used to glorify Apollo as a god of fertility and giver of life¹⁰⁷. The second theory is connected with the word *γένος* which is the word for family. Apollo in this case is worshipped as *πατρώος* which means father or leader of the family¹⁰⁸. It is rather unusual to find the epithet *πατρώος* next to Apollo but it is possible that there was a local cult of Apollo *γενικός* in the Western Black Sea region¹⁰⁹ because the same epithet is attested also in a votive relief discovered in Gegend in Sliven. Furthermore, this theory is supported by the iconography of the relief. The pediment's decoration is a clear indication of a temple dedicated to the god.

The second relief (fig.28) discovered in Gegend is 0.21m high, 0.17m wide and 0.04m thick. It has an arched top and above the relief there is the inscription “*Ἀπόλλων[ι] γεν[ικῶ]*”¹¹⁰. On the scene the Thracian Hero is depicted with full-face, mounted on a galloping horse, turned to the right. He is holding the bridle in his left hand and a stag in his right arm (type C). Below the horse a hound and a lion are attacking the stag. The Hero is dressed in chlamys and chiton.

Similar to the Asclepius case and the entwined snake on the staff, the sculptor in this case probably wanted to emphasize in the religious syncretism between Apollo and the Thracian Hero based on the main symbols (lyre-horse) and epithets of each god. In conclusion a very interesting element about the fusion between the Thracian Hero and Apollo is that although all these votive reliefs do not have the same technique or iconography the image of Apollo is not depicted different from any other typical Thracian Rider¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷ Bruchmann C.H.F. 1893, p.22

¹⁰⁸ Seure G. 1912, p.257-258

¹⁰⁹ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.24-25

¹¹⁰ Opperman M. 2006, p.350

¹¹¹ Dimitrova N 2002, p.216

3.3 Dionysus

Another Greek god presenting a religious connection with the Thracian Horseman is Dionysus. Generally Dionysus was one of the prominent Greek deities worshipped in the Western Black Sea along with Apollo and Asclepius. A tell-tale sign is that the Greek colony Dionysopolis was dedicated to him where he was worshipped as founder and protector of the city. Furthermore, the Bacchic and Orphic mysteries took place in the Greek colonies of the Northern and Western Black Sea region as attested by written sources (Herodotus Book 2) and archaeological finds discovered in the city of Olbia (bronze ritual mirror and bone graffiti plaques)¹¹².

One of the most interesting and well preserved votive reliefs was discovered in the colony of Tomis, modern Constanta (fig.29). The relief is 0,47m high, 0.37m wide and 0.07m thick¹¹³. It was discovered in 1962, in a pit dug while building a housing complex¹¹⁴. Along with the relief the archaeologists had also discovered another twenty three impressive archaeological finds: eight statues and statuettes, one *aedicula*, thirteen reliefs and one altar with phantom traces of letters. Apart from Dionysus who is depicted in two reliefs (but only one with the Thracian Hero), Hecate is on the other six discoveries. Selene, Glycon, Nemesis, Tyche, Isis, Charites, Asclepius, Cybele, Hermes, Dioscuri, Mithras are depicted once on different archaeological finds and the Thracian Horseman is found on the remaining four monuments. The treasury was buried outside the early Roman wall of the city and within the Byzantine one. All the monuments are quite difficult to be dated with accuracy. Probably they are dated from the late Hellenistic era to the Roman period 1st -3rd century A.D.

The marble relief in the shape of an *aedicula*¹¹⁵ with the depiction of Dionysus is not in the form of the three typical types of the Thracian Horseman. The main figure in the centre is not the Horseman but the standing Dionysus, depicted in a young age and clad with chiton and chlamys. In addition, he wears boots on his feet and a crown of ivy and vine leaves on his head, a typical ritual presentation of the god. He is holding the ritual *θύρσος* in the left hand and a *κάνθαρος* in his right hand. At his right near

¹¹² Bilde P. 2008, p.30- 32

¹¹³ Opperman M. 2006, p. 352

¹¹⁴ Alexandrescu-Vianu M. 2009, p.27

¹¹⁵ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.272

his feet, there is a nude male figure which is probably Priapus, son of Dionysus and Chioni or Aphrodite in other versions of the myth. Priapus was a minor god of fertility and protector of livestock. He is depicted bearded, holding fruits in his hands. He is standing nude on a round base toward which a panther is advancing. In the superior corner there is depicted a nude satyr facing to the right with ram feet, a beard and horns. The satyr is picking grapes from a vine in front of him. In the lower corner of the relief there is a depiction of the god Pan or Silvanus¹¹⁶ with the fruit basket on his head and a rod. The ritual fruit basket was called “*λίκνον*” and it is a symbol of Bacchic mysteries as is the “*φαλλοφόρος*”, the basket which also contained the phallus. The *λίκνο* was worn on the head of the priest of Dionysus or his prophet, like Rhesus or Orpheus, and it was a symbol for the cradle of life. The epigram of the Alexandrian poet Phalaikos during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, describes Euanthe dedicating to Bacchus a *λίκνον* together with the entire apparatus of a menade: tympana, tyrs, cymbals and *λίκνον* worn on the head. The *λίκνον* and the round osier basket used in the cult of Dionysus are attested iconographically¹¹⁷.

The Thracian rider is depicted on the right upper corner of the relief. He is depicted bearded with a profile face, mounted on a calm walking horse, holding the bridle with both hands while advancing to the right. He is dressed with a girdled chiton and chlamys. In front of him there is the typical altar with the tree and the entwined serpent¹¹⁸.

The inscription on the upper margin “*Διονύσω ἀγαθῆ τύχη καθηγεμονεῖ*” declares that it is a dedicative relief to Dionysus *καθηγεμών*. Below the relief there is the inscription with the name of the dedicator “*Ἀκυλεῖνος Ἀρτεμιδώρου κατ’ εὐχὴν εὐτυχῶς ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ*”. The relief is probably dated to the Roman period, around 200-250 A.D. because the term is widely used during the imperial period¹¹⁹.

The mysterious cult of Dionysus Kathigemon is dated from the late Hellenistic period and continued to the Roman times. It first started practiced in Pergamon by the Attalids dynasty. It is intriguing that even though neither the cult of Dionysus Kathigemon nor his iconographical type was widely spread outside the kingdom of

¹¹⁶ Alexandrescu-Vianu M. 2009, p.32 note 55.

¹¹⁷ M. P. Nilsson 1974, p. 107.

¹¹⁸ Alexandrescu-Vianu M. 2009, p.31-32

¹¹⁹ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p. 133

Pergamon, both are attested in Tomis. The presence of the cult in the Western coast of the Black Sea region clearly indicates the cultural and possibly the trade connections between the region and the kingdom of Pergamon¹²⁰. Furthermore, the entire scene on the relief is between two columns and below a pediment with acroteria which indicates the existence of a temple to Dionysus Kathigemon in Tomis. In addition, it is intriguing that the dedicator chose to fill the relief with a figure that had no direct mythological connection with the cult of Dionysus like a maenad, Rhesus or Orpheus for example. However, he decided to favorite the image of the Thracian Hero something that proves without any doubt the assimilation of the two gods.

The Thracian Rider was an acceptable deity by all the population of the region: Greeks, Romans and Thracians. It is perfectly logical to choose him over any other deity connected with Dionysus. This theory is supported further by the four reliefs found in the same dug pit (fig.30-33). On all the reliefs the Thracian Hero is depicted mounted on a galloping horse, advancing to the right and dressed with chlamys and chiton. On the first three reliefs it is clear that they are of type B but on the fourth relief the right side is destroyed and it is inconclusive. Another difference between the fourth relief and the other three is that the Rider is holding a spear in his raised right hand in the first three but not on the fourth. In all the reliefs there is the typical altar with the tree but not in all of them is depicted the entwined serpent. Additionally, it is interesting that in the first relief the Hero is depicted with full face, looking to the worshippers. On the other three the hero is depicted profile or with a three quarters face. Unfortunately, none of the reliefs have any inscriptions on it.

Based on the stylistic differences¹²¹ and diversities in the details, for instance the Hero is depicted with a bear on the fourth relief, between the four reliefs we can assume that there were more than one workshop in the area of Tomis created the reliefs.

¹²⁰ Ruscu L. 2014,p. 145

¹²¹ The dimensions of the reliefs are: 1) 0.22m height, 0.23m wide and 0.03m thick – 2) 0.18m height, 0.14m wide and 0.03m thick – 3) 0.3 m height, 0.22m wide and 0.04m thick – 4) 0.23m height, 0.18m wide and 0.04m thick. (in Opperman M. 2006 p.346)

3.4 Sabazios

A non Greek but closely related both to Thracian Hero and to the god Dionysus was Sabazios. According to ancient tradition and ancient written sources there are two versions concerning the cult of Sabazios in the Western Black Sea area (Thracian territories and Moesia). According to ancient comedies of Aristophanes, Lucian and Cicero but also based on Strabo, Sabazios was a Thracian-Phrygian god when he first introduced to the Greeks¹²². On the other version of the myth according to Diodoros, Plutach and John of Lydia Sabazios was assimilated with Dionysus. The Thracians used to call the high priests of Dionysus “σαβαί”¹²³ and based on other written sources Sabazios and Dionysus were fused into the same deity¹²⁴. Based on Diodoros the orphic aspect of Dionysus was named Sabazios¹²⁵.

Unfortunately, little is known about the cult of Sabazios. He was considered a god of fertility, freedom, autonomy and he was known as the "shepherd of heaven". The connection with Dionysus is based mostly on the mystery cult of their religion and specifically their divine ability to grant with redemption their followers. Those who had initiated into their “mysteries”, pass the tests and challenges of the Underworld, gain the immortality of their soul and enjoy their afterlife in the Elysian Fields¹²⁶.

A marvelous marble relief that was discovered in the area of Philippopolis and today is exhibited in the archaeological museum of Plovdiv testifies the functional relationship between Sabazios-Dionysus and the Thracian Horseman. The relief is almost rectangular, broken in two and it is 0.23m wide, 0.37m high and 0.03m thick (fig.34).

On the upper scene the central figure is Sabazios, in his Phrygian form because of the hat on his head. The god is displayed bearded, old aged with long curly hair and dressed with rich garb. He is standing, his left foot is forward and under it there is depicted a ram's head. Sabazios is holding a scepter in his left hand. The scepter's

¹²² Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.187

¹²³ “Σαβάζιον δε το Διόνυσιν οι Θράκες καλούσι και Σαβούς τους ιερούς αυτών” in Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p. 187

¹²⁴ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.187

¹²⁵ “Μυθολογοῦσι δέ τινες καὶ ἕτερον Διόνυσον γεγονέναι πολὺ τοῖς χρόνοις προτεροῦντα τούτου. Φασὶ γὰρ ἕκ Διὸς καὶ Φερσεφόνης Διόνυσον γενέσθαι τὸν ὑπὸ τινων Σαβάζιον ὀνομαζόμενον”, Διόδωρος Σικελιώτης, “Βιβλιοθήκη” volume 4.4

¹²⁶ <http://atlanticreligion.com/2014/08/10/sabazios-the-other-thracian-god/>

ending top is designed as a hand in the act of “*benedictio latina*”¹²⁷. The right hand of the god is raised and holds a round top object but it is not clear what might be represented. Tacheva believes that it is a cone based on other Sabazios’ iconographies. It is interesting that Sabazios on the relief is accompanied by many Greek gods and demigods, whose representations are arranged in two vertical rows. Furthermore, the upper part of the relief has a frame which encloses the whole scene. The frame is depicted in the form of a pediment with acroteria which is a sign for the existence of a temple dedicated to Sabazios in the area¹²⁸.

On the left side of the relief from above to bottom there are depicted the bust of Selene-Luna, Pan and Hermes-Mercury. On the opposite side, on Sabazio’s left, there are the busts of Helios-Sol, Fortuna-Tyche and Daphne in the act of transfiguration. Of course the pairs of the gods depicted are not chosen by luck. Luna and Helios are symbolizing Sabazios as a supreme deity of night and day. Even if this is the first time Tyche appears in a monument dedicated to Sabazios, the iconography of Tyche and Hermes together was quite usual and typical on the reliefs dedicated to Mithras, discovered at the Danube area. The last pair Pan and Daphne is quite interesting. The first is connected of course with the cult of Dionysus and the second with Apollo. Of course, Apollo and Dionysus were very closely connected based on the Orphic myth. After the “*σπαραγμός*” of Zagreus by the titans, Apollo buried the mangled remains of his body under his sacred tripod in Delphi. In addition, when Apollo was absent to the land of the Hyperboreans during the winter solstice Dionysus was the supreme deity and the ruler in Delphi. Interesting enough is the fact that very few presentation of Daphne had been discovered around the region of ancient Thrace. She is usually portrayed as a female figure transformed into the homonym plant. Sabazios is empowered with the divine powers of all these gods and demigods. As a consequence this Thraco-Phrygian deity is described as a ruler of the world, protector of the plants and animals, commander of life and death and master of people’s destiny during their life and afterlife¹²⁹.

¹²⁷ The gesture of blessing with the right hand is shown in a specific manner: thumb, index and middle finger extended, while ring and little finger are bent backwards. This gesture has become archetypical in the West as the Latin gesture of benediction.

¹²⁸ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.170-171

¹²⁹ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.171

The lower part of the relief has a scene of the Thracian hero mounted on a galloping horse and riding to the right. The Hero is dressed with the typical chiton and chlamys but an interesting addition is the Phrygian cap on his head. The object that he is holding in his raised right hand is not clearly visible but surely it is not the typical lance or spear of the type B. Probably it was a pine cone but we cannot be certain because the monument is damaged on that spot. Some scholars believe that the Rider's hand is displayed in the "*benedictio latina*" gesture, enclosing the artifact in his palm. Furthermore, the busts of Helios and Selene are present again on either side of the Thracian Hero. The horse has a bridle and crest and the hero is accompanied by the typical dog hunting the boar. The scene is completed with two female figures on the right part of the relief. The woman closer to the Thracian Rider wears a long himation, a veil and in her left hand there is a long holder. If the object is a torch then probably the female figure represents a goddess, Hecate or Persephone, and not a simple worshipper. The other female figure is depicted with her arms raised, unusual for the Thracian's Horseman reliefs, in the gesture of praying. Below the two females there is a depiction of a bull with bent legs. Probably there was a dog or a lion attacking the bull from behind and this was an animal battle scene, but the relief is severely destroyed on the specific part. Unfortunately, there is no inscription saved on the relief. Nevertheless, based on the representation of the Thracian Horseman and all the details mentioned above the relief is dated to the Roman period, probably on the first half of the 3rd century A.D.¹³⁰

Another artifact attesting the religious connection between the Thracian Horseman and Sabazios was discovered in the village of Krassen, in the Tolbukhin district. It is a masterful ivory hand (fig.35). The hand is 0.11m long and 0.015m wide at the wrist. The artwork is visible on 360° view and it is a masterpiece of skill and attention based on the anatomical details which the sculptor managed to chisel on it¹³¹.

The hand is skillfully sculpted right below the elbow and its ending is in acanthus leaves. It is intriguing that at the base of the hand there is a hole, like a case in order to attach the hand into a ritual staff. The fingers are in the familiar "*benediction latina*" gesture, enclosing a nutshell for some scholars or a pine cone according to Tacheva.

¹³⁰Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.171-172

¹³¹Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.165

The pine cone is divided in two parts. The first one has a cover affixed to it by metal hinge on the one side. The second part has a hole for fastening it on.

On the pine cone there is a sculpted open-work depiction of the Thracian Hero. The Horseman is depicted mounted, galloping to the right. He is clad with chlamys fastened on the shoulder with a clasp or maybe a round fibula. The sculptor preferred to depict him in three quarters view instead of profile and with curly hair. He is holding a spear in his raised right hand hunting down a bear, not the typical boar or lion of the type B, lying flat on its back. Based on the iconography of the Rider and the rest details depicted on the artwork, the ritual ivory hand of Sabazios is dated probably to the 3rd century A.D.¹³²

The hand is undeniably a typical religious symbol of Sabazios. There have been discovered many others in the provinces of Thrace and Moesia. Specifically a pair of hands made of bronze discovered in village of Touchenitsa¹³³ (fig.36) and another bronze right hand in Geadnitsa¹³⁴ (fig.37). The difference between those three hands and the one I analyzed above is that the cone with the representation of the Thracian Horseman is missing. Some scholars express their theory that these bronze and ivory hands were not votive sculpted artworks but they had a ritual use. The hole at the base of the hand combined with the “*benedictio latina*” gesture lead to a conclusion that they were placed on the top of ritual scepters carried by the high priests of Sabazios. This theory is also supported based on the iconography of Sabazios and the scepter he is holding on the relief discovered in Philippopolis. The fertility dispensing hand of the god symbolized by the offering of the pine cone had eventually lost its symbolic meaning but it still holds the characteristic gesture of offering¹³⁵. However, it is very impressing that the priesthood of Sabazios preferred to incorporate a Thracian Horseman than any other religious symbol into one of their most holy artifacts. In my opinion they had chosen this symbol because it was simply the most acceptable to the whole population living in the Western Black basin. Furthermore, the presentation of the Thracian Hero was dominant in the region during this period.

¹³² Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.165-166

¹³³ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.162

¹³⁴ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.173

¹³⁵ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.166

Archaeological evidence which proves the religious connection between the cult of the Thracian Hero and Sabazios, this time not as Dionysus but rather depicted as Zeus, is the stone relief that is exhibited today in the British museum (fig.38). It is only natural that Sabazios as a supreme deity and ruler of the world to be assimilated with Zeus, the supreme deity in the Olympian pantheon. The province that was discovered the relief is unknown but according to Tacheva it could easily come from the region of ancient Thrace. The relief was purchased in Istanbul on 1914 and donated later to the British museum on 1920. The relief is 0.36m long, 0.34 high and 0.06m thick¹³⁶.

On the relief there is a scene of a bearded Horseman mounted on a walking horse and advancing to the right. In front of him there is the typical altar with the tree and the entwined serpent. The Horseman is clad in a short –sleeved chiton and a flowing cloak. There is a diadem on his head. In his right hand the god wields the thunderbolt and in his left he is holding two spears. Near the snake on the tree there is a rare if not the only depiction of a bird, specifically the image of an eagle, on the Thracian Horseman's reliefs. Furthermore, next to the altar on the right bottom of the relief there is a crater. Above the scene there is the inscription: “*Ευτύχος Δι(ί) Σαβαζείω κατ’ονίρον χαριστήριον*”. Based on the inscription the votive relief was a dedication of Eutihos to Zeus Sabazios as a thank offering. On the relief the Thracian influence is not only the image of Zeus in the form of the Thracian Hero but also the two spears the god is holding in his right hand. The two spears is a religious symbol of the Thracian goddess Bendis¹³⁷.

¹³⁶ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.177

¹³⁷ Tacheva- Hitova M. 1983, p.177

3.5 The Great God and Darzalas

One of the deities that connected with the Thracian Horseman was the so called Great God of Odessos. The Great God was apparently the supreme deity worshipped in the Greek colony of Odessos on the Western coast of Black Sea and firstly attested on the coins minted in the city, silver tetradracms and other bronze coins (fig.39-41)¹³⁸. Furthermore, the Great god was also depicted on terracotta figurines discovered in the area of the ancient cemetery. Considering the stylistic information of the coins and the terracotta figurines, combined with other funeral dedications discovered together in the cemetery they are dated to the 3rd century B.C.¹³⁹. We do not know the exact date or period when the cult was invented but based on the archaeological finds it could be traced back to the 4th century at the earliest¹⁴⁰.

On the reverse of a silver tetradrachm (fig.39) the great god is depicted as a standing male figure, left profile, bearded and dressed in a long himation. He is holding a cornucopia in his left hand and a libation bowl in his right. Behind the god on the right side of the coin there is the inscription “ΘΕΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ” and in front of him the word “ΟΔΗΣΣΙΤΩΝ”. Concerning the second word and the genitive form we can understand that the economy of the city belonged to the people and by extension the governmental system of Odessos was democracy. Below the god is the word “ΚΥΡΣΑ” which refers to the name of a legendary magistrate¹⁴¹ responsible for the liberation of the city by a barbarian tribe. On the obverse side there is the head of the same deity wearing a head band. The silver coin is dated to the 2nd century B.C. It is generally accepted that on the other two bronze coins minted was presented exactly the same god¹⁴².

It is only possible that because of the coexistence of the Thracian, Greek, Scythian and later Roman population in the area of the Western Black Sea there was accomplished a cultural connection or even an imaginary community between all these different people that designated the need to invent a common supreme deity with a convenient image and powers for everyone.

¹³⁸ <http://www.sylloge-nummorum-graecorum.org/>

¹³⁹ Petrova A.2013,p. 123-124

¹⁴⁰ Petrova A.2013,p. 124

¹⁴¹ <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ElAnt/V11N1/chiekova.html>

¹⁴² Petrova A.2013,p. 124

The association between the Great God and the Thracian Horseman is displayed on the bronze coins. On the obverse of the two coins there is displayed the head of the Great God. On the reverse side of the first coin (fig.40) there is the Thracian Hero mounted on a slow pace walking horse (type A). The Hero is depicted bearded, dressed in chlamys and kausia, advancing to the right. On the one hand he is holding the bridles and on the other a rather unique object, the horn of abundance¹⁴³. This is of course a clear indication to the silver tetradrachm coin analyzed above. Furthermore, below the horseman there is the word “*ΟΔΗΣΣΙΤΩΝ*” and the monogram “A”. The coin is dated to the 3rd century B.C.

On the reverse of the second bronze coin (fig.41) the Thracian Horseman is depicted mounted on a galloping horse and holding a spear (type B). There is no sign of the dog accompanying the Hero or any of the wild animals. The bronze coin is earlier than the first one and is dated in the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C.

About the connection between the Thracian Horseman and the Great God of Odessos the scholars are divided into three different groups. The first one supports the theory that the Great God on the obverse is the same with the one on the reverse, only depicted as a rider but they reject any reference or identification with the Thracian Hero or any Thracian influence at all. The scholars in the second group identify as the same deity the Great God of Odessos and the Thracian Hero. The third group simply supports the theory of fusion between the Thracian and Greek religious life in the colony of Odessos. The supreme Greek god is influenced by the Thracian local beliefs and as a consequence it was created the new identity of “*ΘΕΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ*”. This theory is reinforced by the fact that around the Greek colony of Odessos there were discovered many sanctuaries of the Thracian Rider¹⁴⁴.

Based on the coins minted in the city, it is not certain if the Thracian Hero was the same deity with the Great god. However, recent archaeological research in Perperikon brought to light new evidence about the cult of the Thracian Hero. Specifically, the Bulgarian archaeologist professor Ovcharov managed to discover two fragments of a ceramic urn with the depiction of the Thracian Hero, 300 meters away from the sanctuary in Perperikon (fig.42). The depiction of the Thracian Hero is very primitive.

¹⁴³ Petrova A.2013,p. 123

¹⁴⁴ Petrova A.2013,p. 123

The Thracian Hero is displayed on the one fragment with a full face and on the other profile and he is advancing to the left, which is a rare. Based on the structure of the ceramic urn the archaeologists believe it is dated in the early Hellenistic period and more precisely from early 4th century to early 3rd century¹⁴⁵, which is earlier or at least contemporary to the first bronze coin discovered in Odessos. Furthermore, the horn of abundance that is depicted on the coin simply proves the religious syncretism between the two deities.

The cult of the great God of Odessos prevailed in the religious life of the colony during the Hellenistic period. It is possible that the cult had a local Thracian origin and adopted by the Greeks when they colonized the Western Black Sea coast but this theory is not easy to determine because the lack of enough archaeological evidence. During the first period of the colonization the dominant deity was probably Apollo, likewise the most colonies in the Black Sea area, and the Great god had a secondary position among the deities worshipped in the city. The situation changed during the Hellenistic years when the “*Theos Megalos*” became the patron deity of Odessos. We are not aware the reasons why the cult became important during this period but a possible military crisis and hostile conflicts could explain the swift in the religious life of the city¹⁴⁶.

The Great god of Odessos was primarily considered a “*cthonian*” deity and these attributes are expressed by the ritual elements depicted in his iconography, the horn of abundance and the ivy wreath leaves on the figurines. The “*cthonian*” identity of the deity triggered the scholars to support the theory that he is connected with the Greek god of the underworld Pluto and the orphic aspect of Dionysus. Apart from the image the Thracian Rider presented on the coins, the Thracian influences on the cult of the Great god are also attested during the Roman period. The deity as ruler of the underworld is worshipped under a different name Darzalas or Derzelas¹⁴⁷. The meaning of the name is not clear but two facts are certain. First of all the name Darzalas is without any doubt of Thracian origin and secondary based on an inscription discovered in the city it is known that there was a temple dedicated to him: “*..εω....(.)ἀγοραν[ομή]σας καὶ ἄρξας πιστῶς καὶ γενόμενος Θεοῦ Μεγάλου Δερζαλα*

¹⁴⁵ <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100136992/archeologists-discover-one-of-the-earliest-representations-of-thracian-horseman>.

¹⁴⁶ <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ElAnt/V11N1/chiekova.html>

¹⁴⁷ Petrova A.2013,p. 124

νεωκόρος ὑπὸ βουλῆς καὶ δήμου τειμῆς [χάριν]”¹⁴⁸. According to the inscription a man who was called “νεωκόρος” was elected by the local authorities (*βουλή και δήμος*) and he was responsible to attend the needs required for the temple. Furthermore, between Markianopolis in Moesia Inferior and Nicopolis ad Istrum there were discovered votive reliefs dedicated to Darzalas. Specifically on one of these reliefs there is the Thracian Horseman (type A). The Thracian Hero is depicted with full-face, bearded, wearing chlamys and mounted on a standing horse (fig.43). The inscription on the relief is particularly interesting: “*Θεῷ ἐπηκόω Δερζει Αἴλιος Διογένης ἵππικὸς εὐζάμενος ἀνέθηκα*”¹⁴⁹. It is a dedication to Darzalas from a Roman, probably an officer in the army, named Ailios Diogenis who had taken a vow to make this relief to honor the god¹⁵⁰. The relief is 0.155m high, 0.125m wide and 0.025m thick and discovered in Metodievo in Preslav region¹⁵¹. It is difficult to determine an exact date when the votive relief was dedicated but it is definitely around the 1st-3rd century A.D.

In addition, another votive relief with the depiction of the Thracian Horseman is discovered in Zwischen Kaspican and Mogila area (fig.44). This time there is no inscription connecting the Thracian Hero with Darzalas or the Great God of Odessos. However, it is certain that these deities are linked on this relief by the horn of abundance the Hero is depicted to hold in his right hand. The Thracian Horseman is depicted full-face, bearded and mounted on a galloping horse. He is advancing to the right and in front of him there is an altar without the typical tree and the entwined snake. On the scene the Hero is accompanied by his dog chasing a wild boar (type B). The relief is probably dated to the 3rd century A.D.¹⁵² and it measures 0.3m high, 0.25 wide and 0.04m thick¹⁵³.

Contingent on the previous analysis the Thracian Horseman obtains as a deity the same “*chthonic*” and “*catachthonic*” characteristics of the Great God and Darzalas. As a consequence the Thracian Horseman was considered a leader and a guide of the souls in the underworld, similar to “*Ερμῆς Ψυχοπομπός*”. This theory is supported not

¹⁴⁸ IGBulg I 1970,230.

¹⁴⁹ To god Derzis who gives ear (to prayers), I, the *equus* Aelius Diogenes, offered while making a vow.

¹⁵⁰ <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V11N1/chiekova.html>

¹⁵¹ Opperman M. 2006, p. 332

¹⁵² <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V11N1/chiekova.html>

¹⁵³ Opperman M. 2006,p.338

only by all the funerary reliefs discovered in the Western Black Sea but also by a votive marble slab discovered in the ancient Greek colony of Callatis, modern Mangalia¹⁵⁴.

On the rectangular marble slab there is a frame surrounding the entire scene with the three male deities (fig.45). On the left side of the slab there is the mounted Thracian Hero on a calm walking horse, advancing to the right (type A). The Hero's face is depicted in three quarters and he is dressed in chiton, chlamys and an unusual ritual cap on his head.

In front of the Thracian Rider on the right side of the relief there is Hermes and Dionysus. Hermes is closer to the Thracian Hero and is depicted standing with full face. Even though his clothes are not visible, Hermes iconography features all the ritual symbol characteristics to certify his identity. He is wearing the ritual *petasus* hat on his head and holding the caduceus in his left hand. Unfortunately it is not distinctive if he also is wearing the *talaria*, the sandals with wings, on his feet. In his right hand there is a ceramic vessel, probably a patera. Next to Hermes is depicted Dionysus. He is dressed in a chiton cleaved to his left shoulder, and a wreath made of ivy leaves on his head. He is holding the *thyrsus* in his left hand and a patera in his right hand just like Hermes. Between Hermes and Dionysus there is an altar where they perform the ritual ceremony of *σπονδή*-libation¹⁵⁵. Next to the Thracian Horseman, on the upper left corner of the relief was probably depicted another male figure that it could be a servant but unfortunately that part of the slab is destroyed. The slab measures 0.16m high and 0.238m wide¹⁵⁶ and it is dated to the Roman period around 2nd and 3rd century A.D.

The slab discovered in Callatis is the only one with the depictions of the Thracian Hero with the two important Greek deities related with the underworld and afterlife. *Orphic* Dionysus and Hermes *psychopompos* had a crucial role as savior deities in the religious life of Greeks and their notion about the afterlife. According to their religion both gods and by extension the Thracian Hero, were responsible to lead the soul in

¹⁵⁴ Opperman M. 2006, p.289

¹⁵⁵ Libation is a ritual pouring of a liquid as an offering to a god or spirit or in memory of those who have died. It was common in many religions of antiquity and continues to be offered in various cultures today.

¹⁵⁶ Opperman M. 2006, p. 352

order to pass the challenges and the guards in the Underworld and gain access to the Elysian field.

In addition, the chthonic powers of the Thracian Horseman are also attested in his representation as a hunter (type B and C). The wild animal is a symbol for the decease or even death. The Thracian Rider strikes down the decease-death (boar, lion, and bear) with his holy spear and returns as a healer and victor of death¹⁵⁷. It is important to mention that the chthonian nature of the Thracian Rider connects him with the cult of Rhesus. The Thracian Hero is not any more a typical hunter but rather a hunter of human souls just like Rhesus¹⁵⁸.

Furthermore, Achilleas Samothrakis believes that the typical altar depicted on the reliefs is used as a symbol for the relatives of the dead to offer sacrifices to the Thracian Hero for the salvation of their relative's soul¹⁵⁹. The entwined snake is interpreted from the majority of the scholars as a typical chthonic symbol¹⁶⁰ and from others as a symbol for the soul of the dead¹⁶¹. The tree next to the altar is also interpreted with different ways. For some scholars it is a symbol of the tree of life and the rebirth of nature¹⁶² while for others is the sacred tree of the world or just a depiction of a typical landscape on the relief's background¹⁶³.

¹⁵⁷ Σαμοθράκης Α.1963, p. 207

¹⁵⁸ Σαμοθράκης Α.1963, p. 207-208

¹⁵⁹ Σαμοθράκης Α.1963, p. 207

¹⁶⁰ Dimitrova N. 2002,p.214

¹⁶¹ Σαμοθράκης Α.1963, p. 207

¹⁶² Fol A.and Mazarov I.1977, p.18-19

¹⁶³ Georgieva I.1965, p.121

3.6 Cybele- Mother of Gods

One of the most popular deities worshipped in the Western Black Sea region was Cybele or the Mother of gods as she is also known. Specifically the cult of Cybele was particularly popular not only in the colonies of Histria, Perinthus, Tomis, Kallatis but also in Nikopolis ad Istrum and Marcianapolis as well around the region of modern Serdica and Phillippopolis¹⁶⁴. Cybele as a deity is connected with many Greek gods and other Anatolian-Balkan cults. Gaia, Hera, Rhea and Demeter are only some of the Greek female deities which the mother of gods has a mixed reception¹⁶⁵. Additionally Cybele is related with a vast number of other deities like Zeus, Dionysus, Sabazios and Attis. In addition, Cybele has a special connection with the cult of Dioscourai. There are evidence that during the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C in the colony of Tomis there was hosted an important annual event with sacrifices to the Mother of Gods and Dioscourai¹⁶⁶.

The origin of the cult of Cybele is probably Phrygian or Anatolian¹⁶⁷. However, soon the cult of the Mother of Gods was spread to ancient Thrace and the colonies in the Western Black Sea coast. Relics related to the cult of Cybele were discovered in the colonies of Histria and Callatis which are dated to the 5th and 4th century B.C. In addition, an important degree in honor of Cybele was discovered in Tomis¹⁶⁸ and is dated on the 2nd century B.C. With the presence of such an important deity in the area was only a matter of time when the Thracians would adjust her image and cult into their own religious life. This adjustment is well attested by the fusion of the Mother of gods with the Thracian Hero and depicted on numerous votive reliefs discovered in the area of Western Black Sea.

The only relic which features clearly all the ritual symbol characteristics of the Mother of Gods with the Thracian Hero is the votive marble relief discovered in Tomis (fig.46) and today is displayed in the Canarache collection in Bucharest. It is certainly the best replica in the group of reliefs discovered in Tomis with the images

¹⁶⁴ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.155-156

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Great-Mother-of-the-Gods>

¹⁶⁶ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.154

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.theoi.com/Phrygios/Kybele.html>

¹⁶⁸ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.154

of Cybele and the Thracian Hero¹⁶⁹. In addition, it is one of the most well preserved reliefs ever discovered.

The relief was created in open work with a border which surrounds the main scene¹⁷⁰. The top of the relief is in the form of a low pediment with a rosette decoration in the interior, which is a clear indication that there was a temple dedicated to the Mother of Gods and the Thracian Hero in Tomis. The relief was constructed by the sculptor in such a way as the viewer has the impression of an *aedicule*.

On the main scene there is the depiction of the Mother of the Gods on the right side of the relief. The goddess is presented full face, seated on a throne with a high back and a stool. Cybele's throne is in between two standing lions in full face. The Mother of Gods is clad with a short-sleeved, girt chiton and a himation which covers her head and passes under her right arm to also spread over her lap. The goddess is depicted with thick hair frames and a triangular forehead. On her head she wears a turreted crown, the ritual *polos*, which is almost in touch with the upper border of the relief. She holds a tympanum-drum in her left hand and a patera in her outstretched right one¹⁷¹.

On the left side of the relief there is the depiction of the Thracian Hero. He is presented full face, mounted on calm walking horse, riding to the right (type A). The Thracian Horseman is dressed with chiton and chlamys. He is holding a patera in his right hand and the brindles of the horse with his left. Under the horse there is depicted the dog accompanying the Hero.

Between the Thracian Rider and the Mother of Gods there is a rectangular altar and the ritual tree, depicted with unusual extensive branches, and the chthonian entwined snake on the tree.

Based on the iconography and all the religious characteristics displayed on the figures of the Thracian Hero and Cybele, the relief is dated to the Roman period, maybe the 2nd -3rd century A.D., and it measures 0.45m high, 0.57m wide and 0.07m thick¹⁷².

¹⁶⁹ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98

¹⁷⁰ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98

¹⁷¹ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98

¹⁷² Opperman M. 2006, p.322

Another votive relief with the images of Cybele and the Thracian Hero was discovered also in Tomis and today is displayed in the archaeological museum in Constanta (Fig.47). The marble relief is 0.33m high, 0.52m wide and 0.11m thick. Unfortunately it is severely damaged and only the left hand-side is preserved. It is not certain if the relief was consisted by one or two separate *aedicule* and because of the relief's bad state there is lack of information for an exact date. More likely it is dated from 2nd to the 3rd century A.D.¹⁷³

The relief's top is in the form of a pediment. On the left side there is an *aedicule* with the depiction of two columns. The left column is decorated with a Corinthian capital and probably the same decoration was existed also on the right but this part is destroyed. Near the right column there is the depiction of a tree and the typical entwined serpent on it¹⁷⁴. Between the two columns there is depicted the Thracian Hero mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right. He is dressed with a chlamys and a chiton. His right hand is raised but the spear is missing. Below the horse there is probably a depiction of the dog chasing a wild boar (type B) but the relief is destroyed also on that part¹⁷⁵.

On the right-hand side is another *aedicule* with the depiction of Mother of the Gods. Cybele is flanked by two lions but only the one on the left is clearly visible. The lion and the goddess are depicted in full face. Regrettably the face of the goddess is destroyed and it is impossible to figure if there was the "*polos*" on her head. She is clad with a long himation and a girt chiton with folds. A different element on the iconography of the goddess is that her feet are visible. The hands of Cybele are touching the lions but it is uncertain if she was holding the ritual *tympanum* and *phiale* due to the eradication on the specific part. Yet the most interesting thing on the relief is that Cybele even though is depicted seated on a throne the viewer has the impression that she is standing. The sculptor managed to depict the dropped himation of the seated goddess without being able to lend it volume¹⁷⁶. All the elements but especially the two columns and the pediment on the relief reinforce the theory of a temple of great importance in the city of Tomis dedicated to the Mother of Gods.

¹⁷³ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98-99

¹⁷⁴ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98

¹⁷⁵ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.98-99

¹⁷⁶ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.99

Apart from Tomis there is another coastal Greek colony that is strongly related with the cult of the Mother of Gods and the Thracian Horseman. Very important votive tablets discovered also during the excavations in the city of Callatis, modern Mangalia. The most interesting of this group is a 0.174m high, 0.275m wide marble rectangular votive tablet (fig.48) which is exhibited today in the archaeological museum of Constanta and it is dated to the 2nd-3rd century A.D.¹⁷⁷

The scene on the table is framed by a border. On the right side of the scene there is the image of the seated Mother of the Gods on a chair with a back. The goddess is clad with short sleeved chiton and himation which is cast over her head like a veil and envelops the shoulders and lap below the knees. The feet of Cybele are visible and depicted as crossed. She is holding a *patera* above a blazing altar in her right hand and probably a *phiale* in her left hand. The object is not visible and could also be a ritual *tympanum*. Next to the altar there is the typical tree with the entwined serpent on it¹⁷⁸.

On the left side of the tablet there is the image of the mounted Thracian Rider on a galloping horse, with a full face advancing to the right. The Hero is dressed in chlamys and with his left hand is holding the brindles. His right hand is raised, holding a spear. The Hero is accompanied by a hound chasing a wild boar.

The intriguing part of the relief is in the middle of the marble tablet, between the two deities. Behind the blazing altar there is a depiction of Priapus, the son of Dionysus, wearing the ritual *λίκνο*, basket with fruits and a symbol for the cradle of life, on his head.

On this magnificent relief the stone cutter not only takes up the greater part of the field but also infringes on the border. Furthermore, it is particularly interesting because it testifies the syncretism between the Mother of Gods, Dionysus and the Thracian Horseman and the importance these deities had in the religious life in the religious life in Callatis.

Another votive tablet with the image of Cybele and the Thracian Rider was discovered in the hinterland of Callatis, in the Limanu area. The rectangular marble

¹⁷⁷ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.89

¹⁷⁸ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.89

tablet is 0.48m high, 0.37m wide and 0.09m thick and it is displayed in the archaeological museum in Constanta (fig.49). The Mother of Gods is depicted seated on a throne with stool on the right side of the tablet. She is turned to the left and her head is in a full face. Cybele is clad with a long chiton with sleeves, a himation and a veil on her head falling on either sides of her face. Her left hand is the only visible, touching her lap. Behind the goddess is depicted the typical tree with the crawling snake¹⁷⁹.

On the left side of the slab there is the Thracian Hero with a full face, mounted on a walking horse and advancing to the right (type A). The Hero is dressed with chiton and chlamys, holding horse's brindles with both hands. Tacheva agrees with Scorpan that the tablet is dated to the 3rd century A.D.¹⁸⁰

The last votive tablet exhibiting in the Constanta museum that connects the two deities was discovered in the hinterland of ancient Histria, in the Fintinele area (fig.50). Although the slab is slightly damaged, the scene is quite clear. On the right side of the marble tablet is the depiction of Cybele, seated on a throne with a back. The head of the goddess is damaged but she was depicted with a full face. The goddess is dressed with the typical iconographical clothing, chiton and himation. Her left hand rests on her lap, holding a *phiale* and with her right she is holding the brindles of the horse which the Thracian Hero is mounted on. The Thracian Rider is depicted in a full face with his right hand raised, holding the spear and hunting a boar. He is dressed with chiton and chlamys. It is interesting that the typical altar with the tree and the entwined snake are missing. The tablet is 0.26m high, 0.33m wide and 0.043m thick and it is dated probably on the 3rd century A.D.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.89

¹⁸⁰ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.89-90

¹⁸¹ Tacheva-Hitova M. 1983, p.106

3.7 Artemis-Diana and Silvanus

Apart from the Nymphs and Cybele there is only one more female deity that it is closely connected with the Thracian Horseman, Artemis-Diana. In the beginning of my dissertation it was mentioned that according to Herodotus Artemis was one of the deities worshipped by the Thracians with the name Bendis¹⁸². Artemis-Bendis was an ancient *chthonian* goddess of the moon, protector of wild animals, nature and hunting. The cult of Bendis-Artemis was spread in Greece by the Thracians and it was extremely popular in Piraeus (fig.51). Specifically in Piraeus there were hosted during the month *Thargelion* the famous Bendideia, festivals with orgiastic character, in order to honor the goddess and ensure her blessing and protection¹⁸³. The religion syncretism between Artemis-Diana and the Thracian Horseman is attested not only on a votive relief (fig.52) but also in an inscription discovered on a limestone altar dedicated to Diana Totobisia (fig.53).

The limestone altar was discovered in Karataš in the Djerdap (Iron Gates) Gorge in 1981 and its measurements are 116 × 43 × 45 cm¹⁸⁴. A part on the front side of the base of the altar is broken and the surface of the altar is severely damaged and rough. Nevertheless, based on the remaining inscription “*Deo Toto/vitioni Aur(elius) / Agathomi/nus (!) mil(es) leg(ionis) / 5 IIII Fl(aviae) catarac(tarum) / stationis Di/aņęę honest(e) / votum libiens (!) / posuit*”¹⁸⁵. According to the inscription during the 3rd century A.D there was a roman fortress and a castle on the rocky, slightly lofty bank of the Danube known as Karataš (Black Stone)¹⁸⁶ dedicated to Diana. The dedicator is Agathomimus, a name that could be misspelled with Agathonimous, who was probably either Greek or of Thracian origin¹⁸⁷. It is clear that the altar not only was dedicated to Artemis-Diana but also testifies that the goddess is strongly related with the cult of the Thracian Hero.

Another altar, dedicated to the Thracian Hero this time, was discovered at Svilengrad in south-central Bulgaria and now is displayed in the City Museum of Veliko Turnovo

¹⁸² Herodotus, “*Ιστορίαι*”, Book 5.7.1

¹⁸³ <http://www.theoi.com/Thrakios/Bendis.html>

¹⁸⁴ Grbić D. 2013, p.9

¹⁸⁵ Grbić D. 2013, p.12

¹⁸⁶ <http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/serbia/cultural-heritage/archaeological-map-of-danube/dianastatio-cataractarum-diana.361.html>

¹⁸⁷ Grbić D 2013, p.15

(fig.54). On the altar there is the inscription: “*Heroni Totoithian.[o] | Ἡρωὶ Τωτοίθιηϋ[ι]*”¹⁸⁸. As it was mentioned above the Thracian Hero was often referred in Latin inscriptions as: *deus and heroni* and sometimes combined as: *Deo Heroni, Deo sancto Heroni*¹⁸⁹. Very often the Thracian Hero was also accompanied by local Thracian epithets like Aulousadas, Avlonites or in this case the epithet *totoithian*. This specific Thracian epithet is presented on a monument dedicated to Artemis-Diana discovered in Hotnitsa near Veliko Tuřnovo (Nicopolis ad Istrum) with the inscription: “*Dianae | Totobi/sie (!) pos(uit) | C. Valer| ius Dot/[us(?)]*”¹⁹⁰.

The religious syncretism between Diana *totobisia* and the Thracian Heroni *totoithian[o]* is quite clear. The two deities are linked under the same religious epithet and belong to the same cult sphere. The difference or better the variety of *Toto-ithi-* / *Toto-viti-* / *Toto-bisi-* are easy to account for by the usual alternation θι / τι / σ in Greek and th / ti / s in Latin tradition of the Thracian name. In any case all of them have the same root. In addition, the same phenomenon is attested on other Thracian epithets like *Zβελθιουρδος, Zβερθουρδος, Zβελσουρδος, Zbelth(i) urdos, Zbeltiurdos / Zbelsurdos, Sveldurdos, Zberturdus* for example¹⁹¹.

Totobisios according to many scholars is a compound word. The first part derives from the latin *doto* or the Greek verb “*δίδομι*” which means “to give” and the second from the word “*-βιθς / -βειθς (-βιτος, -bita, -vitho, -vitu), Gr. φῖτυ*, a word for plant shoot. By this meaning Diana is a goddess of nature, production, accouchement and vegetation. Furthermore, Gerasimova believes that the element “*-ithia*” in the word could mean love-giving god/goddess¹⁹².

The second monument that testifies the religious connection and syncretism between Diana and the Thracian Hero is the rectangular votive relief discovered in the sanctuary of Glava Panega (fig.52). The sanctuary was dedicated to the healing god Asclepius. However, many other deities apart from Asclepius and Hygieia were also worshipped in the same sanctuary. It is intriguing that the only element all these deities have in common is the image of the Thracian Hero.

¹⁸⁸ Grbić D 2013, p.13

¹⁸⁹ See page 26.

¹⁹⁰ Grbić D 2013, p.14

¹⁹¹ Grbić D 2013, p.14

¹⁹² Grbić D 2013, p.14-15

The relief is 0.18m high, 0.21m wide and 0.03m thick¹⁹³ and is dated on the Roman period 1st-3rd century A.D. The scene is surrounded by a rectangular frame and on the right side there is the image of the Thracian Hero depicted with full face, bearded, mounted on a calm walking horse and advancing to the right (type A). He is dressed in chlamys and chiton. He is holding a *phiale* in his right hand while his left hand is not visible. In front of the Hero, in the middle of the relief, there is depicted an altar. The tree and the entwined snake are missing from the scene.

On the left side of the relief there is depicted a female figure full face, dressed in a short dress. She is holding a long torch in her left hand and a *phiale* above the altar in her right hand¹⁹⁴. It would be almost impossible to identify with certainty the female figure if there was not the inscription below the scene: “*Sal]daecaput [eno velenis L(ucius)Naevius Probus:vet(eranus) posuit Silvano et Dianae v(otum) s(olvit)l(ibens) n(uminibus) p(osuit)*”¹⁹⁵. Based on the iconography and the long torch the female figure could be easily mistaken with Hecate or Persephone, deities that usually depicted holding one or two torches. But according to the inscription we can only assume that the goddess on the relief is Artemis-Diana. The name of the dedicator and his profession is inscribed also on the relief “*L(ucius)Naevius Probus:vet(eranus)*”¹⁹⁶. The dedicator was in the Roman army. He was a veteran officer probably wealthy due to his economical status to dedicate such an explicit votive relief to Diana, Silvanus and the Thracian Horseman.

Apart from the schematic faces the Thracian Hero and Diana displayed on the relief¹⁹⁷ an additional and very important element is the name of the god Silvanus presented on the inscription. Even though the god is not depicted on the scene the dedicator chose to include this deity for a reason. Silvanus was originally a Roman god of forests, fields, agriculture, hunting and boundaries and his origins cannot be traced with certainty. The actual name of the God derives from the latin word *sil'vemas* which means woods. He is a god of the nature just like Diana and the Thracian Rider. Although he is not presented on this relief the typical iconography of Silvanus has many elements in common with the Thracian Hero. Silvanus was represented as an

¹⁹³ Opperman M. 2006, p.327

¹⁹⁴ Boteva D. 2007, p.76-77

¹⁹⁵ Boteva D. 2007, p.83

¹⁹⁶ Boteva D. 2007, p.76

¹⁹⁷ Boteva D. 2007, p.77

old bearded male deity most of the times but there are occasions that he is depicted in young age and without a beard. His other symbolic characteristics are: the *falx* (gardening sickle), a dog and the pine represented as a tree, branch or cone (fig.55)¹⁹⁸. The god most of the times presented alone but occasionally is depicted with the company of female deities that have some relation with the nature and the protection of the forests Diana and Nymphs¹⁹⁹. Furthermore, the cult of Silvanus is related with the Thracian Hero not only with this specific relief or the common iconographical elements but also by other votive reliefs discovered in the Western Black Sea region.

Three more votive reliefs with a dedicative inscription to Silvanus and the depiction of the Thracian Hero had been discovered in the sanctuary of Glava Panega all dated to the Roman era.

The first one (fig.56) is 0.27m high, 0.215m wide and 0.04m thick²⁰⁰. It has a depiction of the Thracian Horseman with a full face, mounted on a calm walking horse and advancing to the right (type A). He is dressed in chlamys and chiton and he is holding a patera in his right hand. The tree, the altar and the snake are missing on this relief. The relief is broken on the left and on the right side. On the inscription below the scene it is written the dedication to “*Silvano*”. The second relief (fig.57) has an arched top and based on the inscription above the scene is dedicated to “*Silvano sancto*”. The Rider is depicted as a hunter in three quarters face, mounted on a galloping horse and dressed in a chlamys. His right hand is raised and he is holding the spear. Below the horse there is the dog chasing a wild animal, either a boar or a lion (type B). This part of the relief is destroyed and the animal is not clearly visible. The relief is 0.32m high, 0.24m wide and 0.02m thick²⁰¹.

The third relief is also of the type B but is severely damaged (fig.58). It has an arched top and it is 0.255m high 0.23m wide and 0.03m thick²⁰². The only difference with the other reliefs is that the accompanied animal is a lion and not a dog and there is an altar on the right corner, below horse’s hooves. On the inscription is written “*Silvanu (sic) Salt (e?) capu[teno]*”²⁰³. In addition, there were discovered fragments of other reliefs

¹⁹⁸ Djino D. 2007,p.263

¹⁹⁹ Djino D. 2007,p.265

²⁰⁰ Opperman M. 2006, p.325

²⁰¹ Opperman M. 2006, p.342

²⁰² Opperman M. 2006, p.338

²⁰³ Opperman M. 2006, 338

in the area Lijace near Vraca, connecting the cult of Silvanus with the image of the Thracian Hero. The reliefs unfortunately are in a terrible condition and only the name of the deity Silvanus is saved by the inscription²⁰⁴.

²⁰⁴ Opperman M. 2006, plate 978-979

3.8 Dioscourai and Epona

The cult of the twin demigods Castor and Pollux or Dioscourai as they are also known has its origin in ancient Sparta and the Peloponnese region in Greece²⁰⁵. However, due to the second wave of the colonization from the 6th and 5th century B.C. was spread quickly in the Black Sea basin. The cult of Dioscourai soon became very popular all over the Black Sea area. It is indicative that a Greek colony in the Eastern Black Sea area was named “Dioskourias”, after their legendary founders and protectors. The colony of course was built very close to ancient Colchis, where the Argonauts travel to get the Golden Fleece and the twins Castor and Pollux took part on the expedition.

The Dioscourai were worshipped as the protectors and saviors of sea-voyages, guests and as the patron gods of horsemen and races. Furthermore, they had a chthonian nature due to the fact that they were worshipped as the combination of immortal and mortal nature, a fact as important to their cult as their association with horses²⁰⁶. In their typical iconography they were depicted as a pair of naked youths, sometimes with traveler’s cap and cape and a horse or abbreviated horse-head by their side (fig.59). They were given many epithets like: *θεοί μεγάλοι, Άνακτες παίδες, Αμβούλιοι, Σώτεροι, Αφεθρίοι, Λάπερσαι*.

Because of its very nature as twin horse gods, the cult of Dioscourai was only natural to have close relation with the cult of the Thracian Hero. As protectors of the sailors and sea voyagers they were worshipped especially in the coastal colonies of the Western Black Sea basin. I mentioned above that the cult of Dioscourai was one of the most prominent in the city of Tomis from the 3rd century B.C., closely related to the cult of Cybele and by extension to the Thracian Horseman²⁰⁷.

In addition, in Tomis together with the relief of Dionysus and the other four reliefs with the image of the Thracian Hero²⁰⁸ there was also discovered another marvelous sculpted artwork (fig.60). It is a statuary group of the twin demigods from which only the one part is preserved together with his horse²⁰⁹. On the basis of the group there is a

²⁰⁵ <http://www.theoi.com/Cult/DioskouroiCult.html>

²⁰⁶ <http://atlanticreligion.com/tag/thracian-horseman/>

²⁰⁷ See page 51.

²⁰⁸ See pages 37.

²⁰⁹ Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.34

dedicative inscription to Dioscouroi “[Δ]ιοσκόρους κτίστ[ας τῆς πόλεως τῆ φυ]- λῆ Βορέων ἀνέ[θηκεν — — — — —] . . ος Ἀσκληπιωδ[ώρου — — — — —]” and is dated from late 2nd to early 3rd century A.D²¹⁰. According to the inscription the demigods Castor and Pollux were considered as the legendary founders of Tomis something that explains the fact that their cult was extremely popular in the city²¹¹.

Furthermore, the cultural connection between the Thracian Hero and Dioscouroi is empowered by archaeological evidence discovered in the provinces of Moesia and Thace. More specifically a votive relief was discovered in Pestera near the Pazardzik region with an inscription written in Greek: “θεοῖς Διοσκόροις Αυγαζων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ιδίων ἐύχην”²¹². The votive relief has an arched top and it is 0.2m high, 0.173m wide and 0.03m thick²¹³. It is dedicated to the gods Dioscouroi by Αυγάζων who was either Greek or can also be defined as a Thracian²¹⁴. According to the inscription the dedicator pray to the gods Dioscouroi, not demigods which is quite surprisingly, to protect him and his family.

On the scene of the relief (fig.61) the Thracian Hero is depicted as a hunter, with a three quarter face, mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right (type B). He is holding the spear in his raised right hand and he is clad in a chlamys and chiton. Below the hooves of the horse there is a lion which according to Boteva the wild animal is not the companion of the Hero. Boteva classifies the specific relief in a special category under the name “*Rider engaged in single combat against a lion*” where the lion is hunted down by the Thracian Rider²¹⁵. On the right corner there is an altar but the tree, the snake and the dog are missing from the scene²¹⁶. The relief is dated to the Roman period and it is very interesting that a great number of votive reliefs of the Thracian Hero discovered in the same region near Pestera and five of them belong to the same the category²¹⁷.

The last monument related to the religious syncretism between the Thracian Hero and Dioscouroi is a votive tablet discovered in Augustae (Harlec) in the Orjahovo area

²¹⁰ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.135

²¹¹ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.135

²¹² Opperman M. 2006, p.340

²¹³ Boteva D. 2005, p.213

²¹⁴ Boteva D. 2005, p.214

²¹⁵ Boteva D. 2005, p.212-214

²¹⁶ Boteva D. 2005, p.216

²¹⁷ Boteva D. 2005, p.212-216

(fig.62). The tablet is 0.41m high, 0.24m wide, has a triangular top, and it is divided in two different parts. On the upper part there is displayed the Thracian Hero full face, mounted on a galloping horse and advancing to the right. His clothes are not visible but he was probably dressed in a chlamys. In his right hand he is holding a patera and in front of him there is the usual altar with the tree and the entwined snake.

On the lower part of the tablet there is displayed a female figure flanked by two horses. According to Opperman and based on the iconography, the female figure is the cultic goddess Epona²¹⁸. The goddess is depicted full face, embracing the two horses with her hands. Epona is clad with a himation and a veil over her head. The cult of Epona is strongly related with the twin demigods Castor and Pollux because Epona as a deity was the patron goddess of mares and foals²¹⁹. In my opinion the two horses could easily be a symbolism of Dioscouroi. The cult of Epona was spread in the Western Black Sea basin due to the Celtic invasions in the area during the 4th and the 3rd century B.C. It is certain that her cult attracted particularly the Thracians because of the connection with horses, not only an important but also a sacred animal for them. As a consequence the Thracians and probably the Greeks adopted and emerged in time her cult into their religious life something which is attested on the relief. During the Roman period the cult of Epona was prominent in the military Roman pantheon because of the cavalry squadrons²²⁰.

²¹⁸ Opperman M. 2006, p.298

²¹⁹ Her name contains an allusion to the horse: in Celtic, "epos" means "horse" and the suffix "-ona" affixed simply means "on". <http://www.ancient.eu/article/153/>

²²⁰ Tudor D. 1969, p. 143-144.

CHAPTER IV

The Thracian Horseman: Religious Syncretism with Heroes in the Western Black Sea Area

I mentioned in my dissertation that the Thracian Hero according to Opperman was a protective deity with a local character. Because of his dominance in the religious life of the people living in the Western Black Sea basin the Thracian Rider was not simply a common motif that assimilated the divine powers of nearly every Greek and Roman god but something much more. All scholars studying ancient Thrace agree that the Horseman represents the rulers or members of the aristocracy²²¹. These Thracian kings and aristocrats were worshipped as Heroes after their death and eventually some of them like the case of Zalmoxis became gods. The place of their tomb was usually where the worshippers dedicated their offerings. The tomb was sacred and sometimes a temple was also built above it to honor the protective Hero. This cult of the mortal Heroised Dead passed from the one generation to the other, something which was particularly convenient for the aristocrats and rulers because they promoted their title to their divine origin ancestors²²². As a consequence the number of local Thracian Heroes increased rapidly through time and every region had its own local Thracian Hero and protector²²³. This is the reason Dumont notes that the correct notion should be in plural form “*Thracian Heroes-Riders*”²²⁴. The monuments of the Thracian Hero with local epithets are thousands and they are both votives and funerary. In my dissertation I am going to focus on the most popular epithets: Karabasmos, Perkos and Manimazos, describe and analyze an indicative example for each local Hero.

²²¹ Avramova M. 2015,p.67

²²² Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p. 206

²²³ Σαμοθράκης Α. 1963, p. 206

²²⁴ Dumont A. 1886,p.512

4.1 Hero Karabasmos

The epithet Karabasmos is probably the most popular connected with the cult of the Thracian Hero. It is a characteristic epithet that it was spread in the whole Western Black Sea basin, especially in the area around ancient Odessos. In addition the epithet Karabasmos is connected not only to the Thracian Rider but also above to Greek gods, as it was mentioned²²⁵.

A very interesting votive relief dedicated to the Hero Karabasmos and one of the most well-preserved discovered in the area of Odessos (fig.63)²²⁶. The marble relief is 0.55m high, 0.48m wide and 0.10m thick. It is dated around the 2nd century A.D.²²⁷ and is displayed today in the archaeological museum of Varna²²⁸. The scene is surrounded by a rectangular frame which on the left and right side is sculpted as columns. Above the main scene there is the inscription dedicated to the god; “*Ἡρωὶ Καραβασμῶ χαριστήριον*” and below the scene the twenty one names of the dedicators who are gathered by a priest named Numenius; “*θοινεῖται οἱ περὶ τὸν ἱερέα Νουμήνιον Ζήνιδος | Ἀπελλᾶς Μενάνδρου, Διονύσιος Ἐπικράτους, | Μένιππος Ἑλληνας, Ἀγαθήνωρ Μητροδώ|ρου, Ἑλληνας {Α} Ἀρπαλέος, Αἰαντίδης Ἀρτεμιδώρου, Ἀρτεμίδωρος Ἱερωνύμου, Καλλι|σθένης Ἀρτεμίδωρου, Ἀντίφιλος Ζωπυρί|ωνος, Ἐλευσεῖνιος Ἐλευσεινίου, Ζωῖλος Ἐρ|μαφίλου, Αἰαντίδης Μενάνδρου, Ζωπυρίων Ἀ[ν]|τιπάτρου, Ἑλλ<η>ν Χαιρέου, Ἡρότειμος Ἀρτεμίδώ[ρου], | Ἀρτεμίδωρος Δημητρίου, Ζωπυρίων Ἀρτεμίδώ[ρου], | Ἀντίφιλος Ἀγαθήνωρος, Αἰσχρίων Ξενάνδρου*”. On the left margin of the relief it is written the name “*Ἀπολλώνιος Ἀπολλωνίου*” and on the right the name “*Ἀγαθήνωρ Ἀντιφίλ<ο>ν*”²²⁹.

On the scene of the relief the Thracian Hero is displayed with a three quarter face mounted on a calm walking horse, turned to the right (type A). He is holding the

²²⁵ *Ἀπόλλωνι [Καρ]αβα[σμο]*, See page 27

²²⁶ Opperman M. 2006, p.322

²²⁷ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.82

²²⁸ <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/dedication-to-hero-karabasmos-by-banqueters-undated/>

²²⁹ “*The banqueters (thoinetai) who are gathered around the priest Numenius son of Zenis: Apellas son of Menandros, Dionysios son of Epikrates, Menippos son of Helles, Agathenor son of Metrodoros, Helles son of Harpaleus, Aiantides son of Artemidoros, Artemidoros son of Hieronymos, Kallisthenes son of Artemidoros, Antiphilos son of Zopyrion, Eleuseinios son of Eleuseinios, Zoilos son of Hermaphilos, Aiantides son of Menandros, Zopyrion son of Antipatros, Helles son of Chaireas, Heroteimos son of Artemidoros, Artemidoros son of Demetrios, Zopyrion son of Artemidoros, Antiphilos son of Agathenoros, Aischrion son of Xenandros, Apollonios son of Apollonios, and Agathenor son of Antiphilos.*”, IGBulg I² 1970,78(3)

brindles with both hands and he is dressed with chlamys and chiton. In front of him there is an altar decorated with a bull and behind the altar it is depicted the bust of a male figure. The male figure is holding a tray with fruits on his head so it is definitely connected with the cult of Dionysus. He could be either Pan or a satyr because his feet are not visible or even Priapus, wearing the ritual *λίκνο* on his head. In addition, the choice of the animal is not by chance because the bull was one of the sacred animals sacrificed to Dionysus during the Bacchic and Orphic mysteries. On the right corner of the scene there is a Hermai. The Hermai were sculpted stele with a head, usually the head of Hermes by whom it derives the name, above a plain on which male genitals may also be carved at the appropriate height. It was used for “apotropaic” function and were placed at crossings, country borders and boundaries as protection, in front of temples, near to tombs, in the gymnasia, palaestrae, libraries, porticoes, public places, at the corners of streets and on high roads as sign-posts, with distances inscribed upon them²³⁰. Between the Hermai stele and Priapus there is the typical tree and the entwined snake on it.

It is intriguing that on the scene all the figures are connected with the Orphic cult and the afterlife. Furthermore, the columns on the sides of the scene indicate that there was a temple in Odessos dedicated to Hero Karabasmos where the sacred mysteries of Dionysus took place. It is possible that the priest Numenius was the high priest in the temple and the dedicators written below are the members of a *thiasos* who had initiated the Orphic mysteries²³¹.

²³⁰ <http://www.hellinon.net/parallila/?p=343>

²³¹ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.83

4.2 Hero Perkos

Another local Hero connected with the cult of the Thracian Rider in the area of Galata is the Hero Perkos or Perkonos. The specific area of course had been part of the *chora* of Odessos at least since the 4th century B.C.²³²

In the Petrabana locality which is located 1.5 km south of Galata was discovered a votive relief with a dedication to the local Hero Perkos (fig.64). The relief is 0.48m high, 0.38m wide and 0.075m thick and is dated from the 2nd century B.C. to the 1st century B.C.²³³ Below the relief there is the inscription “*Ἡρωει Περκωνει Μένανδρος Ἀμόντορος*”²³⁴.

On the right part of the scene it is depicted the Thracian Hero with profile face, mounted on a calm walking horse, advancing to the right. He is dressed with chlamys and chiton and his right hand is in the *benedictio latina* gesture. In front of the Rider there is an altar and behind it a female figure dressed in a himation. Her right hand is raised in a gesture of praying. Above the female woman, who is probably a goddess, there is a tree and an entwined serpent on it.

The name of Hero Perkos is related with the cult of the Thunder god and derives from the Greek word *κεραυνός*. According to a Latvian variant form *perkauns* or else *peraunus* is the word for thunderbolt and quite similar to the Greek word. According to a theory *peraunus* was replaced by the rhyming *Keraunos*²³⁵.

²³² Petrova A. 2013,p.120

²³³ Petrova A. 2013,p.122

²³⁴ IGBulg I² 1970, 283

²³⁵ West M.L. 2007, p.243-244

4.3 Hero Manimazos

The epithet of the local Thracian Hero Manimazos is also very popular and it is presented not only in the area of Odessos but also in Tomis. An indicative example about his cult discovered in Tomis and is today displayed in the archaeological museum of Bucharest (fig.65). The relief is 0.41m high, 0.32m wide and 0.06m thick. It is dated to the first period of Roman occupation around the 1st century A.D.²³⁶ and is divided in two parts²³⁷.

The top of the upper part is broken and we cannot know if there was any inscription. Fortunately the scene on the relief is intact. On the right side there is displayed the Thracian Horseman with profile face, mounted on a calm walking horse, turned to the right. The Hero is clad with chiton and chlamys, holding the brindles with both hands. In front of him there is a standing female figure dressed in a himation and a veil over her head. She is holding a patera in her right hand over an altar decorated with a wild animal, probably a stag. Behind the altar it is depicted the tree with the entwined snake²³⁸.

On the lower part of the relief there is an anaglyph boat with a mast. On the boat there are displayed two standing figures, looking the front, with their arms raised. On the inscription below the scene it is written; “*εὐχὴν ἥρωι Μανιμάζωι Διοσκοουρίδης Ἀρίστωνος ἀνέθηκεν*”²³⁹.

On the matter of the boat of the lower part there are three theories. The first one is connected to the profession of the dedicator Dioscouridis, probably he was a sailor. In the second theory the relief is funerary and the boat has a symbolic character. It is used by the deceased Dioscouridis in his final journey of the dead in the afterlife. The third theory is the most interesting one. The standing figures on the boat are Dioscouroi, protectors and saviors of sailors in danger. This theory is finding a ready acceptance by the name of the dedicator which could involve the twin demigods bearing the same name²⁴⁰. It is important to remember that the cult of Dioscouroi was particularly popular in the Greek colony of Tomis. Based on this hypothesis the

²³⁶ Opperman M. 2006, p. 8

²³⁷ Hampartumian N. 1997, p.47

²³⁸ Hampartumian N. 1997, p.47

²³⁹ Hampartumian N. 1997, p.47

²⁴⁰ Hampartumian N. 1997, p.47

religious syncretism between the Hero Manimazos and Dioscouroi as sea deities and saviors of sea voyagers is quite obvious²⁴¹.

²⁴¹ Λιάππα Μ. 2013, p.138

CHAPTER V

5.1 CONCLUSION-RESULTS

Nearly two centuries after Dumont for the first time coined the term “*Thracian Horseman*”, today the cult of the Thracian Hero remains rather obscure and it has interpreted in many different ways despite the great number of the monuments bearing his image²⁴². Of course the fact that the Thracians left no written records toughens up the work of the archaeologists and scholars to shed light into this interesting and mysterious cult.

Despite the many interpretations and problems we are able to conclude many interesting elements concerning the cult of the Thracian Hero. The theory about the religious syncretism between the Thracian Horseman and nearly every Greek, Roman, Thracian and Eastern deity in the Western Black Sea area is accepted by all scholars. Ivan Venedikov makes a representative description about the variety of his divine powers: “*the Thracian horseman appears with the attributes of nearly every Graeco-Roman deity, ranging from Aphrodite's shell to Ares' helmet, from the Sun's radiate crown to Asclepius' serpent staff, from Apollo's lyre to Silvanus's saw, to name only a few*”²⁴³. The cult of the Thracian Hero adopted by people of different ethnicities (Thracians, Romans, Greeks) living in the Western Black Sea region because they felt the necessity to have a common religious figure connected with all the divine powers of their religious life. This fact is proved by the names of the dedicators written on the inscriptions of the reliefs; names of Thracian, Greek, Roman origin and also Romanized individuals²⁴⁴.

Moreover, in my opinion the most important element in Thracian Hero's nature is that he is moving between the world of mortals and immortals, the very essence of life and death. He bears both the solar aspects of Apollo and the chthonian Orphic nature of Dionysus-Sabazios. He is a healer and a savior and at the same moment a hunter-killer and a protector of justice. The people knew that they could never become gods. This was hubris and could evoke the wrath of the gods, known as *νέμεσις* in the

²⁴² Boteva D. 2011, p.85

²⁴³ Dimitrova N. 2002, p.210

²⁴⁴ Boteva D. 2007, p.87

ancient world. This is exactly the reason they needed a mortal Hero who passed the challenges of the underworld and gained access to the world of the immortals. The mortal people wanted to maintain the hope that there is a better life for them after their death and simultaneously the Thracian Hero became the symbol of hope. A symbol for all the population living in the Western Black Sea basin to preserve their faith and through him to believe that they could also enter into the world of the gods and live forever.

Furthermore, based on the iconography of the votive and funerary reliefs, we can understand that the Thracian Hero even though he was the most popular religious figure in the Western Black Sea area he was not the supreme deity in the Thracian pantheon. This is clearly attested in the votive relief discovered in Tomis, dedicated to Dionysus kathigemon and many other reliefs where the Thracian Hero is depicted much smaller than the other deities. According to Boteva the chthonic serpent had probably the highest level of divinity and it was the Lord of the Universe²⁴⁵. This theory explains the fact that in the majority of the reliefs there is an altar between the Hero and the Serpent or the other deities. The Thracian Rider was the human envoy to the gods. He had the holy duty to deliver mortal's prayers to the gods and for that he needed the altar. Moreover, this hypothesis explains the dedications to lesser gods like Dioscouroi or the Nymphs who are depicted as the Thracian Horseman²⁴⁶.

Additionally, the arched top form of the votive reliefs is not a simple technique but it has a further symbolical use. It is connected with the form of the mounded graves of the Thracian aristocracy and kingship known as *tumuli* (fig.66). There are more than 15000 tumuli discovered in modern Bulgaria which proves the strong connection between the arched top reliefs and the funerary customs of the Thracians. In the interior of the *tumuli* the dead aristocrat was buried together with his horse. This is a clear indication that the Heroised dead practiced in the area. The deceased was transformed into the Thracian Hero, the mediator to the gods and by extension the *tumuli* was not a simple tomb but automatically upgraded into a *ηρώο*, a sanctuary where the worshippers could offer sacrifices and offerings²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁵ Boteva D. 2002, p.818

²⁴⁶ Boteva D. 2011, p.101

²⁴⁷ Boteva D. 2011, p.99-101

Based on the archaeological finds the cult of the Thracian Hero was practiced from the early 4th century B.C. until the 3rd century A.D. and it was one of the most prominent in the Western Black Sea region. Only the reliefs bearing the image of the Thracian Hero overcome the 3000. The same image is also presented in other important archaeological finds like rings, coins, statues and statuettes, appliqués, sarcophagus. This proves that the Thracian Hero was without any doubt the most popular religious figure in the area. It is interesting that even the cult of the Hero had stopped practicing the motif survived through the ages until today. It was first adopted by the Bulgarian khans and then by the Orthodox Church.

The famous Madara Rider is located in the north-east of Bulgaria, near the village of Madara (fig.67). The relief was cut in a vertical rock at 23 m height and is dated to the 8th century A.D. It measures 2.6 m in height and is 3.1 wide at the base. Based on it was constructed as a triumph sign during the reign of the khan Tervel and his successors. On the scene it is depicted a human size Rider, mounted on a calm walking horse, turned to the right. On the scene there is also a dog and a wooded lion. The Madara Rider was included in the World Cultural and Natural Heritage List at the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Committee session of 1979 in Luxor, Egypt²⁴⁸.

In conclusion, 1000 years earlier the Church had done all in its power of burying Thracian alters, and erasing the “pagan” names, but it couldn’t change, or eliminate the culture and rituals. Today the Hero is worshipped under a new name and iconography²⁴⁹ (fig.68). The image of St. George on a galloping horse, slaying a dragon is attested everywhere all over the Christian world. It is intriguing that today St. George is one of the most important in Bulgaria and the region of Thrace in Greece. Furthermore, the Christians attribute divine and healing powers to St. George quite similar with the powers attributed to the Thracian Hero²⁵⁰.

²⁴⁸ http://www.bulgarianembassylondon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=84

²⁴⁹ <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/board/index.php?topic=25089.200;wap2>

²⁵⁰ <http://www.eidisis.gr/arthrografia/kostas-pinelis-ethima-kai-laiki-latreia-poy-syndeontai-me-tis-giortes-ton-agion-dp1.html>

5.2 Image-Figure Catalogue

Cover photo; Statue of the Thracian Hero in Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Archaeological Institute with Museum.

1. Statue of the Thracian Hero in the Archaeological museum of Varna.
2. Votive Relief of Type A discovered in Odessos.
3. Votive Relief of Type B in Plovdiv museum.
4. Votive Relief of Type C in Plovdiv museum.
5. Votive Relief with inscription above and below the scene.
6. Plan and Reconstruction of the sanctuary near Pernik.
7. Silver diobol minted in Mesimbria with the inscription “ΜΕΛΣΑΣ”.
8. Red figure situla with the death of Rhesus by Lycurgus painter (360 B.C)
9. Votive relief with the inscription “[κυρί]αις Νύμφαις” discovered in Burdapa.
10. Votive relief dedicated to the Nymphs, discovered in Philippopolis.
11. Sacrificing ritual to Zalmoxis.
12. Votive relief with the depiction of Asclepius and Apollo discovered in Krupac.
13. Votive relief with the image of Thracian Hero, Asclepius and Hygieia.
14. Votive relief with the image of Asclepius as the Thracian Hero.
15. Votive relief dedicated to Asclepius and Aphrodite.
16. Votive relief with the inscription “θ[εῶ] ἐ[πηκό]ω Σαλτοβουση[νω]”.
17. Votive relief with the inscription “κυρίω Ασκληπιῶ Σαλδοκεληνω”.
18. Votive relief with the inscription “κυρίω Ασκληπιῶ καὶ Ὑγεία Σαλδήνοις”.
19. Votive relief with the inscription “κυρίω Ασκληπιῶ Σαλδοουισσηνω καὶ Ὑγεία”.
20. Votive relief with the inscription “Ἀπόλλωνι Ζγουλαμηνω”, discovered in Trud.
21. Votive relief with the inscription “ἀγαθῆ τύχη Ἀπόλλωνι Ζγουλαμηνω”.
22. Painting in the tomb in Vergina with the depiction of the royal hunt.
23. Painting in the tomb in Alexadrovo with the depiction of a hunting scene.
24. Votive relief dedicated to Apollo with the inscription “κυρίω Ἀπόλλωνι”.
25. Votive relief of the Thracian Hero with a lyre discovered in Lozen.
26. Relief with the inscription “[θεῶ] Ἀπόλ[λωνι] {Ἀπόλλωνι} [Καρ]αβα[σμο]”.
27. Votive relief of the Thracian Hero dedicated to “Ἀπόλλων γενικῶ”.

28. Votive relief discovered in Gegend dedicated to “*Ἀπόλλων γενικῶ*”.
29. Votive relief discovered in Tomis dedicated to Dionysus *καθηγεμών*.
30. The first relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis.
31. The second relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis.
32. The third relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis.
33. The fourth relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis.
34. Votive relief discovered in Philippopolis and dedicated to Sabazios.
35. Hand of Sabazios with the depiction of the Thracian Hero on the pine cone.
36. Bronze hands of Sabazios discovered in Touchenitsa.
37. Bronze hand of Sabazios discovered in Geadnitsa.
38. Votive relief dedicated to Zeus-Sabazios in British museum.
39. Silver tetradrachm with the image of the Great God of Odessos.
40. Bronze coin with Thracian Hero on the reverse and the Great God of Odessos on the obverse.
41. Bronze coin with Thracian Hero galloping on the reverse and the Great God of Odessos on the obverse.
42. Fragments of the urn discovered in Perperikon with the image of the Thracian Hero.
43. Votive relief with the inscription “*Θεῶ ἐπηκόω Δερζει Αἴλιος Διογένης ἵππικὸς εὐζάμενος ἀνέθηκα*”.
44. Votive relief discovered in Zwischen Kaspican and Mogila area.
45. Votive relief with the depiction of the Thracian Hero with Hermes and Dionysus discovered in Kallatis.
46. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele discovered in Tomis.
47. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele discovered in Tomis.
48. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele in the archaeological museum of Constanta.
49. Votive relief discovered in Kallatis, in the Limanu area.
50. Votive relief discovered in Histria, in the Fintinele area.
51. Votive relief dedicated to Bendis made in Athens around 400-375 B.C.
52. Votive relief dedicated to Diana and Silvanus.
53. Altar with the inscription dedicated to “*Diana Totobisia*”.

54. Altar with the inscription dedicated to “*Heroni Totoithian*”.
55. Relief with the depiction of Silvanus.
56. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and inscription “*Silvano*”.
57. Votive relief with the inscription “*Silvano sancto*”.
58. Votive relief with the inscription “*Silvanu (sic) Salt (e?) capu[teno]*”.
59. Relief with the typical presentation of Dioscouroi.
60. Statuary group with the image of Dioskouroi discovered in Tomis.
61. Votive relief with the inscription “*θεοῖς Διοσκόροις Αὐγαζῶν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἰδίων ἐσχῆν*”.
62. Votive tablet dedicated to Epona discovered in the Orjahovo area.
63. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Karabasmos discovered in Odessos.
64. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Perkos, discovered in Petrabana locality.
65. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Manimazos, discovered in Tomis.
66. Plan of the mound (tumulus) with the rectangular *temenos* near the village of Isperihovo.
67. The Madara Rider.
68. The Christian Icon of the Thracian Hero.Saint George.

5.3Map Catalogue

1. Map with the Thracian tribes and Towns.
2. Map with the most important Sanctuaries of the Thracian Hero.
3. Map with the Greek colonies in the Black Sea.

5.4 Images-Figures



Figure1. Statue of the Thracian Hero in the Archaeological museum of Varna²⁵¹.



Figure 2. Votive Relief of Type A discovered in Odessos²⁵².

²⁵¹ <http://varna-bulgaria.info/2012/businessman-donated-unique-ancient-thracian-statue-to-the-archaeology-museum/>

²⁵² http://www.my-favourite-planet.de/images/middle-east/turkey/pergamon/varna_dj-09082005-1-167d_thracian-rider-relief.jpg



Figure 3. Votive Relief of Type B in Plovdiv museum²⁵³.

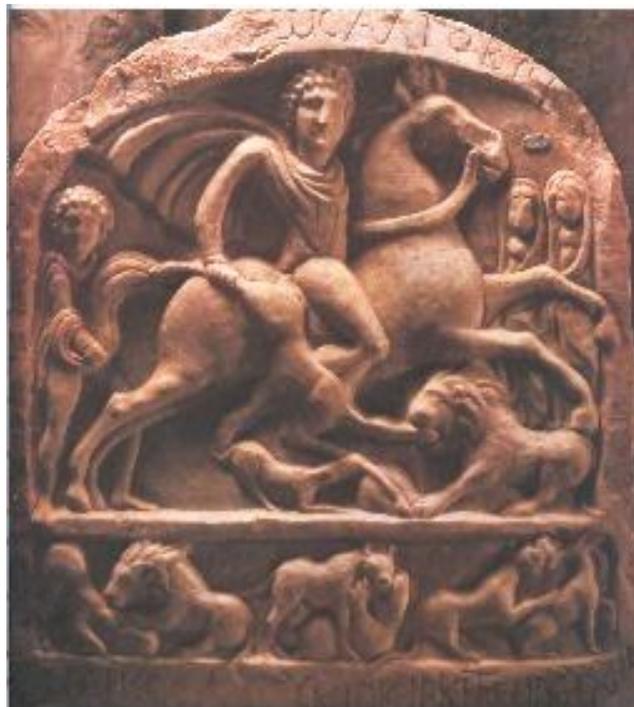


Figure 4. Votive Relief of Type C in Plovdiv museum²⁵⁴.

²⁵³ <http://www.kornbluthphoto.com/images/ThracianHorseman.jpg>

²⁵⁴ http://www.kroraina.com/thracia/hb/thracian_hero6.jpg



Figure 5. Votive Relief with inscription above and below the scene²⁵⁵.

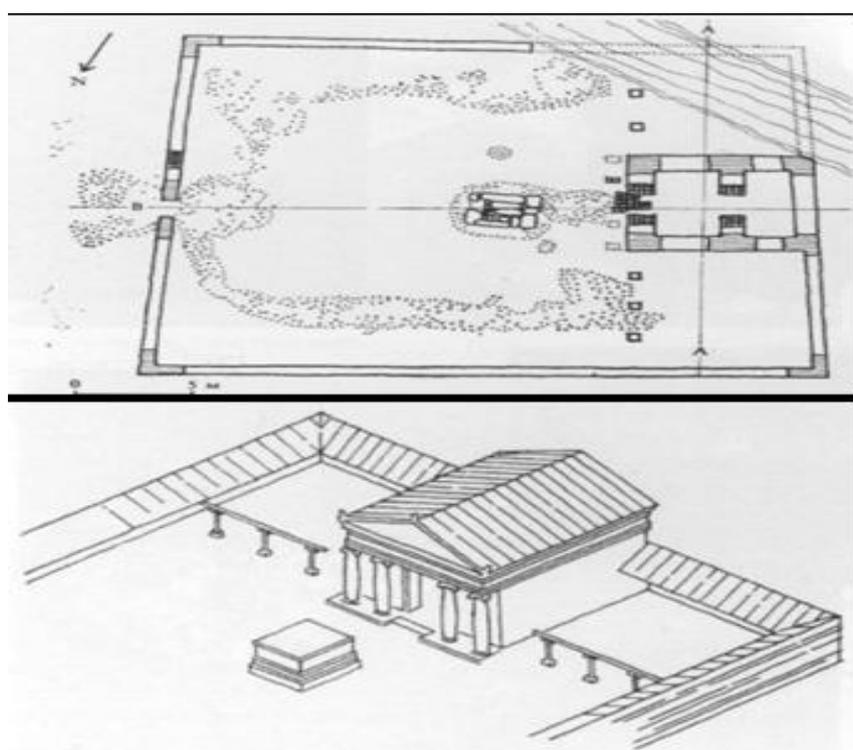


Figure 6. Plan and Reconstruction of the sanctuary near Pernik²⁵⁶.

²⁵⁵ <http://www.mirela.bg/dynamic/i/articles/html/46/29046/16069.jpg>

²⁵⁶ Boteva D.2011, p.92

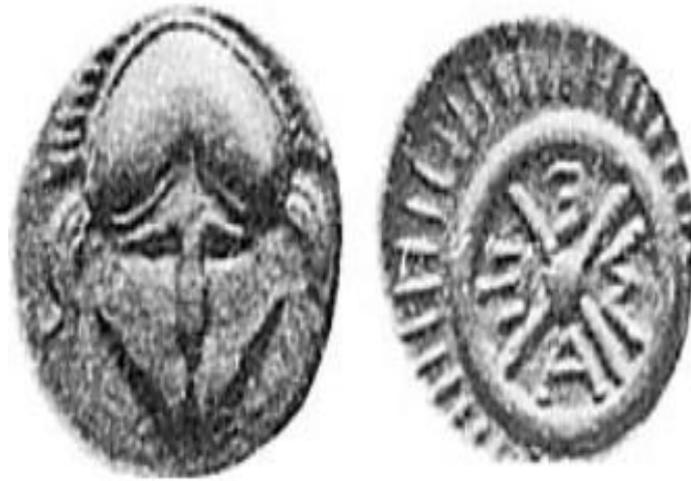


Figure 7. Silver diobol minted in Mesimbria with the inscription “MEΛΣΑΣ”²⁵⁷.

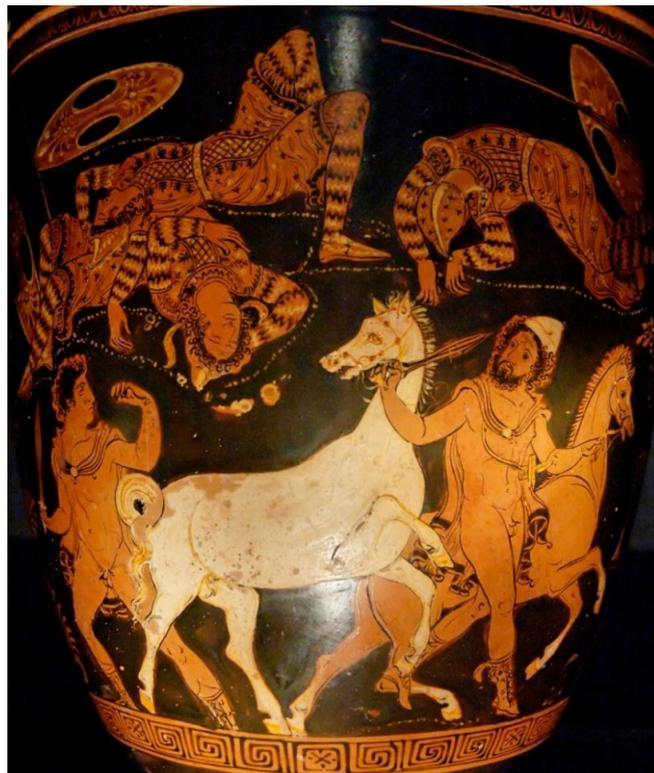


Figure 8. Red figure situla with the death of Rhesus by Lycurgus painter (360 B.C)²⁵⁸.

²⁵⁷ <http://www.sylloge-nummorum-graecorum.org/>

²⁵⁸ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4f/Rhesos_MNA_Naples.jpg



Figure 9. Votive relief with the inscription “[κυρι]αις Νύμφαις” discovered in Burdapa²⁵⁹.



Figure 10. Votive relief dedicated to the Nymphs, discovered in Philippopolis²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁹ Opperman 2006 Tafel 84.

²⁶⁰ https://c2.staticflickr.com/6/5122/5208792919_410cc1b95d_b.jpg



Figure 11. Sacrificing ritual to Zalmoxis²⁶¹.



Figure 12. Votive relief with the depiction of Asclepius and Apollo discovered in Krupac²⁶².

²⁶¹ <http://touristinromania.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/zamolxes-2.jpg>

²⁶² Opperman M. 2006, Tafel 14



Figure 13. Votive relief with the image of Thracian Hero, Asclepius and Hygieia²⁶³.



Figure 14. Votive relief with the image of Asclepius as the Thracian Hero²⁶⁴.

²⁶³ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 9

²⁶⁴ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 85



Figure 15. Votive relief dedicated to Asclepius and Aphrodite²⁶⁵.



Figure 16. Votive relief with the inscription “*θ[εῶ] ἐ[πηκό]ω
Σαλτοβυση[νω]*”²⁶⁶.

²⁶⁵ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 14

²⁶⁶ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 78



Figure 17. Votive relief with the inscription “*κυρίω Ασκληπιῶ Σαλδοκεληνώ*”²⁶⁷.



Figure 18. Votive relief with the inscription “*κυρίω Ασκληπιῶ καὶ Ὑγείᾳ Σαλδήνοις*”²⁶⁸.

²⁶⁷ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 33.

²⁶⁸ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 17



Figure 19. Votive relief with the inscription “*κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῶ Σαλδοουισσηνῶ καὶ Ὑγείᾳ*”²⁶⁹.



Figure 20. Votive relief with the inscription “*Ἀπόλλωνι Ζγουλαιμηνῶ*”, discovered in Trud²⁷⁰.

²⁶⁹ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 45

²⁷⁰ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 8



Figure 21. Votive relief with the inscription “*ἀγαθὴ τύχη Ἀπόλλωνι Ζουκιαμῆνῳ*”²⁷¹.



Figure 22. Painting in the tomb in Vergina with the depiction of the royal hunt²⁷².

²⁷¹ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 39

²⁷² <https://wordscene.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/hunting-painting-with-philip-alexander.jpg>



Figure 23. Painting in the tomb in Alexandrovo with the depiction of a hunting scene²⁷³.



Figure 24. Votive relief dedicated to Apollo with the inscription “*κρίω Απόλλωνι*”²⁷⁴.

²⁷³ http://bulgariatravel.org/data/media/article/402_001_Alexandrovka_grobnaica.jpg

²⁷⁴ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 43



Figure 25. Votive relief of the Thracian Hero with a lyre discovered in Lozen²⁷⁵.



Figure 26. Relief with the inscription “[θεῶ Ἀπόλλ]λωνι
{Απόλλωνι} [Καρ]αβα[σμων]”²⁷⁶.

²⁷⁵ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 13

²⁷⁶ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 3



Figure 27. Votive relief of the Thracian Hero dedicated to “*Ἀπόλλων γενικῶ*”²⁷⁷.



Figure 28. Votive relief discovered in Gegend dedicated to “*Ἀπόλλων γενικῶ*”²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁷ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 87

²⁷⁸ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 77



Figure 29. Votive relief discovered in Tomis dedicated to Dionysus *καθηγεμών*²⁷⁹.



Figure 30. The first relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis²⁸⁰.

²⁷⁹ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81

²⁸⁰ Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.45



Figure 31. The second relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis²⁸¹.



Figure 32. The third relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis²⁸².

²⁸¹ Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.45

²⁸² Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.45



Figure 33. The fourth relief of Thracian Hero discovered in Tomis²⁸³.



Figure 34. Votive relief discovered in Philippopolis and dedicated to Sabazios²⁸⁴.

²⁸³ Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.45

²⁸⁴ http://www.sabazius.com/uploads/7/4/8/8/7488884/4316424_orig.jpeg

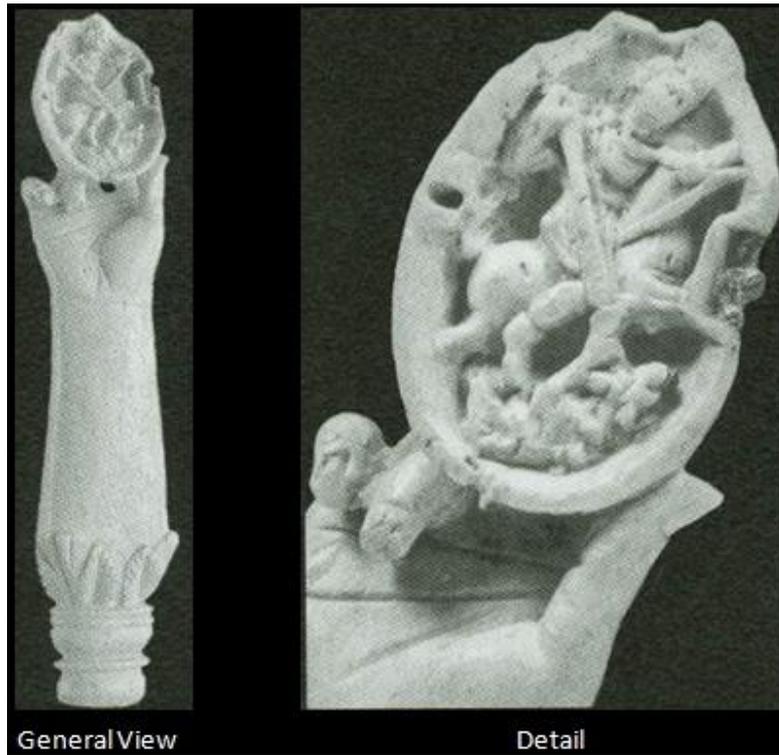


Figure 35. Hand of Sabazios with the depiction of the Thracian Hero on the pine cone²⁸⁵.



Figure 36. Bronze hands of Sabazios discovered in Touchenitsa²⁸⁶.

²⁸⁵ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81

²⁸⁶ Tacheva-Hitova M.1983,plate LI



Figure 37. Bronze hand of Sabazios discovered in Geadnitsa²⁸⁷.



Figure 38. Votive relief dedicated to Zeus-Sabazios in British museum²⁸⁸.

²⁸⁷ Tacheva-Hitova M.1983,plate LIX

²⁸⁸ http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=897167001&objectId=392855&partId=1



Figure 39. Silver tetradrachm with the image of the Great God of Odessos²⁸⁹.



Figure 40. Bronze coin with Thracian Hero on the reverse and the Great God of Odessos on the obverse²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁹ <http://www.sylloge-nummorum-graecorum.org/>

²⁹⁰ <http://www.sylloge-nummorum-graecorum.org/>



Figure 41. Bronze coin with Thracian Hero galloping on the reverse and the Great God of Odessos on the obverse²⁹¹.



Figure 42. Fragments of the urn discovered in Perperikon with the image of the Thracian Hero²⁹².

²⁹¹ Petrova A. 2013, p.123

²⁹² <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100136992/archeologists-discover-one-of-the-earliest-representations-of-thracian-horseman>



Figure 43. Votive relief with the inscription “*Θεῷ ἐπηκόῳ Δερζει Αἴλιος Διογένης ἵππικὸς εὐζάμενος ἀνέθηκα*”²⁹³.



Figure 44. Votive relief discovered in Zwischen Kaspican and Mogila area²⁹⁴.

²⁹³ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 29

²⁹⁴ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 43



Figure 45. Votive relief with the depiction of the Thracian Hero with Hermes and Dionysus discovered in Kallatis²⁹⁵.



Figure 46. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele discovered in Tomis²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁵ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81

²⁹⁶ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 3

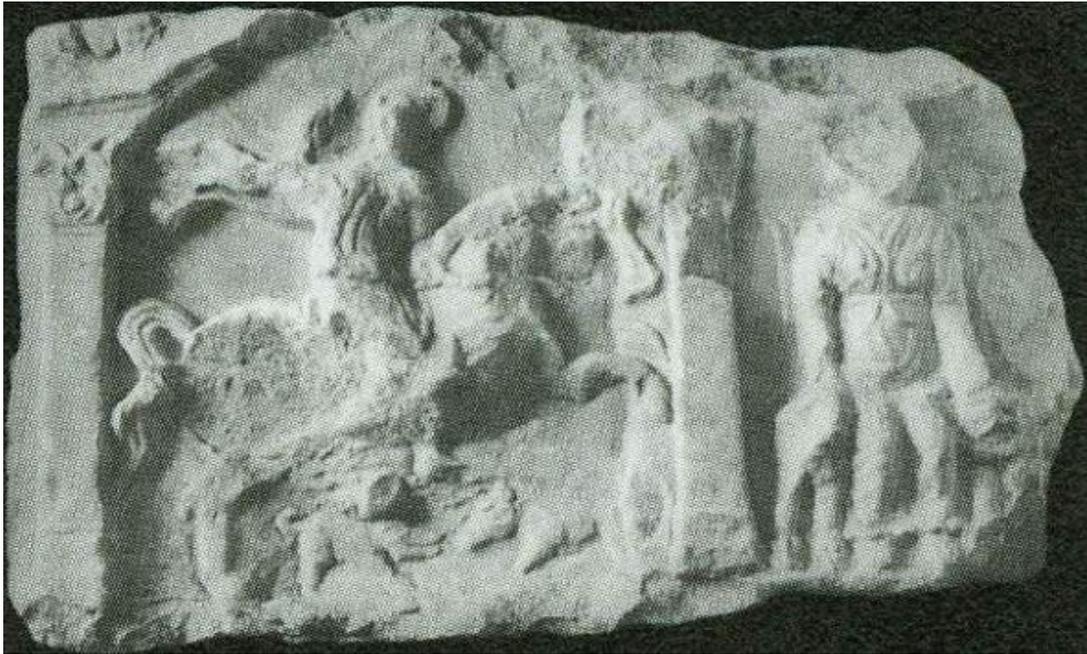


Figure 47. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele discovered in Tomis²⁹⁷.



Figure 48. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and Cybele in the archaeological museum of Constanta²⁹⁸.

²⁹⁷ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81

²⁹⁸ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81



Figure 49. Votive relief discovered in Kallatis, in the Limanu area²⁹⁹.



Figure 50. Votive relief discovered in Histria, in the Fintinele area³⁰⁰.

²⁹⁹ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 27

³⁰⁰ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 81



Figure 51. Votive relief dedicated to Bendis made in Athens around 400-375 B.C.³⁰¹



Figure 52. Votive relief dedicated to Diana and Silvanus³⁰².

³⁰¹https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%92%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%B4%CE%B9%CF%82#/media/File:Relief_Bendis_BM_2155.jpg

³⁰² Opperman M.2006, Tafel 14



Figure 53. Altar with the inscription dedicated to “*Diana Totobisia*”³⁰³.



Figure 54. Altar with the inscription dedicated to “*Heroni Totoithian*”³⁰⁴.

³⁰³ Grbic D.2013,p.20

³⁰⁴ Grbic D.2013,p.20



Figure 55. Relief with the depiction of Silvanus³⁰⁵.



Figure 56. Votive relief with the image of the Thracian Hero and inscription
 “*Silvano*”³⁰⁶.

³⁰⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvanus_\(mythology\)#/media/File:0_Autel_d%C3%A9di%C3%A9_au_dieu_Sylvanus_-_Musei_Capitolini_\(1\).JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvanus_(mythology)#/media/File:0_Autel_d%C3%A9di%C3%A9_au_dieu_Sylvanus_-_Musei_Capitolini_(1).JPG)

³⁰⁶ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 10



Figure 57. Votive relief with the inscription “*Silvano sancto*”³⁰⁷.



Figure 58. Votive relief with the inscription “*Silvanu (sic) Salt (e?) capu[teno]*”³⁰⁸.

³⁰⁷ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 54

³⁰⁸ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 43



Figure 59. Relief with the typical presentation of Dioskouroi³⁰⁹.



Fig. 21a-b. Dioscuri.

Figure 60. Statuary group with the image of Dioskouroi discovered in Tomis³¹⁰.

³⁰⁹ https://nordonart.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/04-26-2012-antiquities-london_page_044.jpg

³¹⁰ Alexandrescu-Vianu M.2009,p.44



Figure 61. Votive relief with the inscription “θεοῖς Διοσκόροις Ἀνγαζων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἰδίων εὐχὴν”³¹¹.



Figure 62. Votive tablet dedicated to Epona discovered in the Orjahovo area³¹².

³¹¹ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 49

³¹² Opperman M.2006, Tafel 37



Figure 63. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Karabasmos discovered in Odessos³¹³.



Figure 64. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Perkos, discovered in Petrabana locality³¹⁴.

³¹³ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 2

³¹⁴ Opperman M.2006, Tafel 2



Figure 65. Votive relief dedicated to Hero Manimazos, discovered in Tomis³¹⁵.

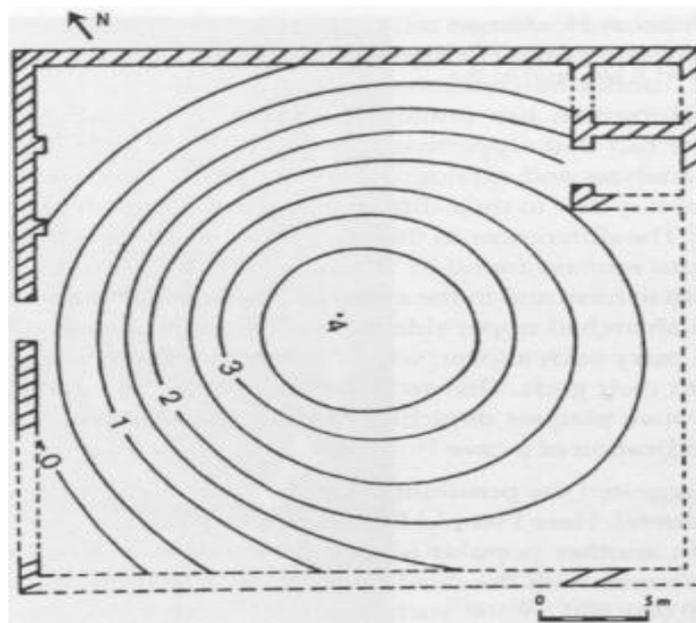


Figure 66. Plan of the mound (tumulus) with the rectangular *temenos* near the village of Isperihovo³¹⁶.

³¹⁵ Opperman M. 2006, Tafel 2

³¹⁶ Boteva D. 2011, p.100



Figure 67. The Madara Rider³¹⁷.



Figure 68. The Christian Icon of the Thracian Hero. Saint George³¹⁸.

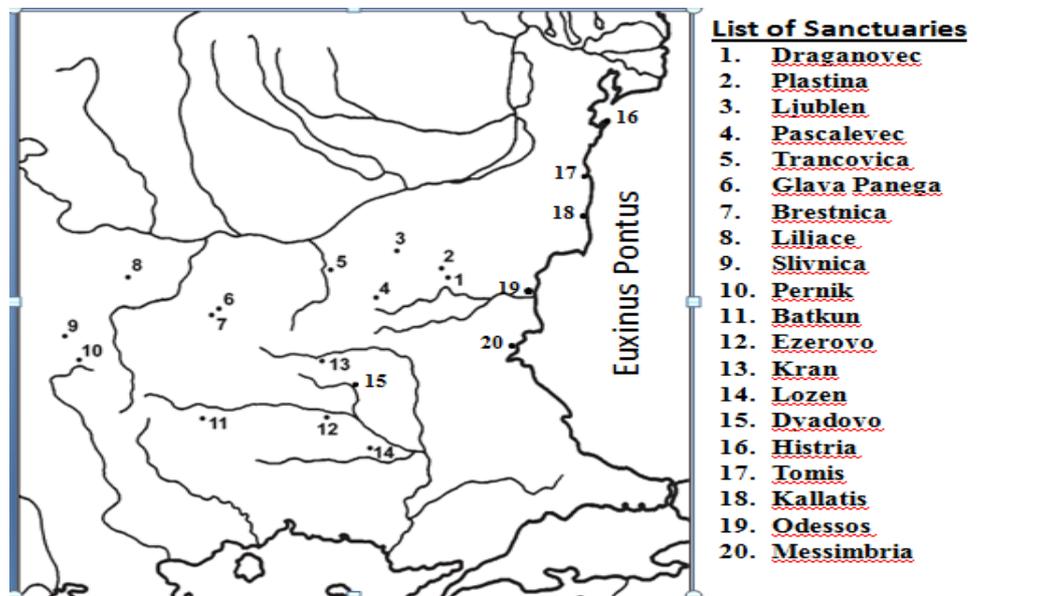
³¹⁷ http://bulgariatravel.org/data/media/011_001_Arheologicheski_rezervat_Madara.jpg.jpg

³¹⁸ <http://stgeorgekeene.nh.goarch.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/NewStGeorgelcon.jpg>

5.5 MAPS



MAP 1. Map with the Thracian tribes and Towns³¹⁹.



Map 2. Map with the most important Sanctuaries of the Thracian Hero³²⁰.

³¹⁹ http://www.eliznik.org.uk/Bulgaria/history/bulg-map/thracian_tribes+towns.GIF

³²⁰ Boteva D. 2007, p.78.



Map 3. Map with the Greek colonies in the Black Sea³²¹.

³²¹ http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2197/2050032252_01856b1d21.jpg